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Their sorrow, their story: The lived experience of individuals impacted by the death of Special Forces members in the 1996 Black Hawk accident

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The story speaks for itself: A thematic information analysis of an intended phenomenological study of the lived experiences of spouses and parents bereaved by the death of Special Forces members killed in combat.

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ABSTRACT

The Australian Special Forces (SF) members have faced considerable adversity with combat deployments to Afghanistan as an elite operational unit of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). There have been 40 combat deaths since 2001 and despite the significant research available on bereavement and violent death, to date there is a gap in the literature to guide the provision of bereavement support for spouses and parents of those SF members killed in action. Contemporary qualitative research into combat related bereavement has found a number of themes which gave meaning to bereavement outcomes found in the non-SF context and recommended that future studies in this field be extended to include SF bereavement.

This study used a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design for the study of the bereavement experiences including perceptions of social support of widows and parents of SF members killed in action (KIA) in Afghanistan. In stressing the importance of the lived experiences of participants the purpose was to understand the lived experiences through the use of semi-structured face to face interviews.

The journey of this research depicts a two phase study in which the first phase was unsuccessful in the recruitment of bereaved SF spouses and in the second phase the potential bereaved parent participants withdrew before the interview stage. Remaining true to phenomenological inquiry the focus of the researcher returned to the phenomenological paradigm for guidance on the way forward. It was a journey which reflected that in phenomenological inquiry the story should be allowed to tell itself. The resulting extension to this study featured a thematic information analysis of this study. Using the Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam analysis model, four dominant themes emerged to explain the recruitment challenges of this study. The extracted themes included the SF as a hard to reach population; specific bereavement research challenges; research methods and design and, the ethics review processes. These were used to explain the phenomena of research challenges in the SF context. The outcome of this study is discussed in the context of the themes and guidance for future research in SF combat related bereavement.

Keywords: hard to reach population, ethics review, combat death, bereavement, Special Forces, phenomenology, support, thematic information analysis

The declaration page
is not included in this version of the thesis

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ACRONYMS

ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADHREC	Australian Defence Human Research Ethics Committee
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
ARA	Australian Regular Army
BOI	Board of Inquiry
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CDF	Chief of the Defence Force
DCO	Defence Community Organisation
ECU	Edith Cowan University
ECUHREC	Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee
IDF	Israeli Defence Forces
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
KIA	Killed in Action
MDD	Major Depressive Disorder
MIA	Missing in Action
NHMRC	National Medical and Health Research Committee
NOK	Next of Kin
PEC	Primary Emergency Contact
PTE	Private – rank in the Army
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
SASR	Special Air Service Regiment
SF	Special Forces
SOF	Special Operations Forces
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VVCS	Veteran's and Veteran's Counselling Service

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Australian National Audit Office (ANAO): An agency responsible to the Commonwealth Attorney General for providing auditing services to the Parliament and public sector agencies. The ANAO undertakes independent assessments and performance audits of selected agencies.

Defence Community Organisation: An agency within the Department of Defence which provides support to ADF members and their families. In the event of a military death the DCO will provide support to the bereaved family.

Primary Emergency Contact: The person which a Defence member nominates as the first person to contact in the event of a casualty or their death. The Primary Emergency Contact is often the same person as the Next of Kin.

Improvised Explosive Device: A homemade bomb which is constructed in an improvised manner often using crude or home sourced materials.

Notification: The process of informing a primary emergency contact nominated by an ADF member as the first person to be advised of their death or an emergency.

Operation Slipper: The operational name given to Australia's contribution to the War on Terrorism in Afghanistan which commenced in 2001.

Repatriation: The process of returning deceased military members back to their country of origin which for the ADF is Australia.

Resources Trust Fund: A perpetual trust fund which provides support and relief to current and former members of sections of the Australian Special Forces and their dependents who become deceased or disabled in or as a result of operational service or in training.

SASR. The Special Air Service Regiment based at Swanbourne W.A.

Service Chiefs: The Chief of the Defence Force, the Chief of Navy, the Chief of Army and the Chief of the Royal Australian Air Force.

Snowball sampling. The recruitment of potential participants who have been referred to the research by other participants or friends, also known as chain sampling.

Special Forces (SF). Highly trained elite unit of the ADF which is trained and employed in unconventional missions. Includes SASR, Commandos and the Special Operations Engineering Unit.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Australian Special Forces (SF) are elite operational units of the Australian Regular Army (ARA) within the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Special Forces have unique sub-cultures that function within protected and secure environments and in war time the SF operate in specific combat and combat support roles. The SF are comprised of the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR), the 1st Commando Regiment, the 2nd Commando Regiment, the Special Operations Engineer Regiment (SOER), the Special Operations Logistics Squadron, the Special Forces Training Centre (SFTC) and the Parachute Training School . These SF Units have undertaken specific missions as part of Australia's contribution to the post 9/11 War against Terrorism and as such have been deployed to Afghanistan since 2001 as part of Operation Slipper.

In the line of duty SF have sustained over 50% of the ADF deaths in this war and although there is considerable research on non-military bereavements there is limited research on military and military combat bereavement. There appears to be little known literature on the bereavement experiences of Australian SF spouses.

The Frye (2012) study recommended that future combat related bereavement studies be extended to bereavement experiences for SF widows given the differences between the culture of SF and other military units. This, together with observations of client bereavement experiences and the apparent lack of literature on SF related bereavement was an opportunity which led this researcher on a journey of qualitative phenomenological study of the lived experiences of SF spouses bereaved by the death of a SF member in combat.

Phenomenological research is not traditional research as depicted in quantitative or experimental research. Rather, it is a philosophical research approach which is used to capture the essence of an experience or phenomena as narrated by study participants. The essence of an experience is the dimensions or meanings of the experience that are shared in common with others. Phenomenology is also embedded in dialogue which encourages further interest in the phenomena and themes to emerge (Moustakas, 1994). It is a journey of discovery for researchers and the narration of a story in which the participants, as narrators and the main players actively take ownership of their story. This is in contrast to traditional quantitative research in which participants are sources of data from which findings can be verified and principles formulated (Hadjistavropoulos

& Smythe, 2001). This research journey aligns with Gray's (2014) proposition that the story should be allowed to speak for itself.

This phenomenological research incorporates a transcendental approach in which the researcher must set aside their personal preconceptions about the phenomena. The researcher approaches the study of the specific phenomena from a view with new eyes (Moustakas, 1994). The undertaking of these processes are reflected in Figure 1 which depicts my journey through phenomenological research. It depicts the essential element in the understanding of phenomenology, namely the narrative of the participant and the requisite of allowing the story to speak for itself (Gray 2014). This figure depicts the five completed phases, however, each chapter of this study will provide a diagrammatic representation of the story as it unfolds.

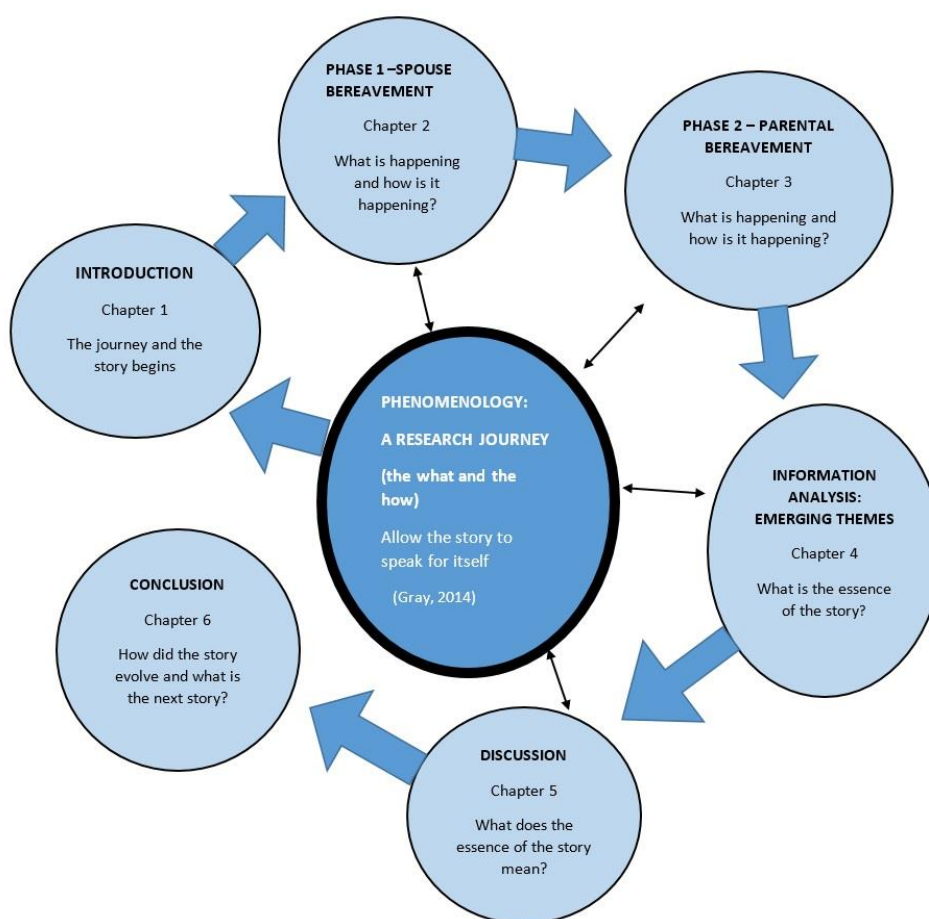


Figure 1. The journey through a phenomenological research study

Chapter 1 of this study introduces the journey of this researcher and the background to the phenomena of interest, namely the lived experiences of the bereaved spouses of the deceased SF members killed in combat. The challenging phases of the study are introduced and it also positions the researcher in the context of social work support to the bereaved Next of Kin (NOK) of deceased ADF and SF members. The chapter explicates the purpose, significance and research approach of the study and concludes with the research assumptions, questions, bereavement definitions applicable to this study and the way forward in this journey

MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

This journey into the world of phenomenological research in the field of military related bereavement evolved from my long term professional experiences as a military social worker including social work support specific to SF. These experiences of 12 years involved supporting ADF personnel, their families and friends after the death of an ADF member and the subsequent bereavement support to their next of kin. The bereavement support experiences were wide and varied and involved combat and non-combat deaths. My professional practice included bereavement support related to traumatic events such as suicide, car accidents and training incidents, humanitarian operations and the return of remains of ADF members missing in action from the Vietnam War and the Indonesian – Malaysian Confrontation 1963-1966. The provision of support which related to non-traumatic deaths included the contexts of death by natural causes and illness.

Throughout these years of providing bereavement support I observed the struggles the bereaved had with forming meanings for their loss, particularly in the political context. There was also a growing discomfort in adapting to public grief which often vacillated between pride for a hero and the distress associated with public mourning. I observed the ageing of grief particularly with parents of the deceased and I listened to the stories told by the mates of soldiers killed in combat. I witnessed the special relationship between those who survived the battles and the families of those who did not and I wondered about the lived experiences of the bereaved in these contexts. At times whilst I was in awe of the resilience of the bereaved families and friends of the deceased, when reflecting on their experiences I wondered about the voice of the bereaved and how this could assist others in similar positions. I also looked further for

the evidence base which would explain and guide practice in bereavement support to future SF families.

In professional practices it is essential to reflect on experiences and for me this included a critique of my own social work professional practice model including an examination of the evidence upon which my practice was based. Considerable literature is available which indicates the often quoted normal course of grief, however, on reflection of my military social work I noted bereavement experiences which appeared to be an important story of their own. In noting the practice stories articulated by other military social workers, my practice wisdom also informed me of differences in the bereavement of the next of kin of non-SF and SF members killed in combat and non-combat contexts. Further, I struggled with explaining SF bereavement through traditional frameworks.

As was expected the expressions of grief stricken spouses soon after notification of the death of their beloved husbands killed in combat were all different and all so obviously painful. However, in the days following the notification through to post-funeral there was an aura of mystery surrounding the grief. It was as though ownership of the grief no longer belonged with the bereaved. Observations of interactions between the bereaved and the military however, suggested that for the bereaved this may have provided comfort. It was different to the bereavement experiences related to non-SF, non-combat deaths and it appeared to be more than could be explained by individual differences within grief. It was here that my research journey followed a pathway of critical inquiry to better understand the bereavement experiences as lived and articulated by the bereaved spouses of SF killed in combat.

In starting down the research path I recalled that despite the vicissitudes of grief reactions there are certain principles which I understood could be transferred across the bereavement domains. These included for example the unique nature of grief, the importance of empathy and respect and the appropriate acknowledgement of the expression of intense emotions. However, in examining the underlying assumptions of various bereavement support frameworks, policies and guidelines there were at times an underlying assumption in those writings that bereavement support is the same regardless of the traumatic nature of death and the socio-cultural contexts in which the death is grieved.

I felt that this absence of a conceptual framework relevant to SF combat deaths was hindering the ability of military social workers like myself to provide evidence based

practice in the SF combat context. I believed there could or perhaps should be a framework which is predicated on an understanding of the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of the bereaved themselves. I also believed that the perspective of a SF spouse regarding the attributes of a deceased warrior and the impact of a warrior death on a family could also only be understood by dialogue with the bereaved spouse.

Therefore I chose a phenomenological approach the essence of which is to be found in the lived experiences as articulated by the bereaved themselves. This would allow me to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of SF bereavement and how the bereaved lived their grief and made sense of their loss.

In the initial stage of this study I imagined a straightforward line of qualitative inquiry which would lead me from the background literature review, to the research design followed by the implementation of the methodology. I imagined listening to the bereavement stories of spouses and the subsequent development of insight into the main themes of their experiences.

I soon discovered that the first phase of my research journey into the study of the phenomena of SF bereavement would take me on an unexpected, complex and challenging path. The fact that I was unsuccessful in recruiting bereaved SF spouses led me on a pathway which involved recruiting another population of potential participants namely parents of SF killed in combat but a path which nevertheless stayed true to the research framework of phenomenology. When this second phase was challenged by the withdrawal of the parental participants I decided to reconsider the concept of understanding the narrative I assumed would be forthcoming.

In re-examining the concepts of qualitative inquiry it was evident that I needed to continue the study and determine what the true story was in this research project. Phenomenological research is interested in understanding a phenomena from the perspectives of the participants and the lack of participants in a specific study is a phenomena in itself and one which requires further exploration.

My study became a staged research project comprised of two equally significant and important phases which stayed true to the framework of phenomenology (Figure 1). The next section provides a summary of the phases of this research journey. Each phase is examined and discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

Phase 1: Bereaved spouses

This phase is the original research project on the study of the lived experiences of spouses bereaved by the death of SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan. An initial significant challenge on the journey was the ethics approval process which influenced my ability to recruit SF spouses to this study. A combination of possible methodological limitations and the assumptions of ethical reviewers regarding the impact of research on the bereaved may have influenced the recruitment outcome. That is, the study of SF spousal bereavement did not recruit any potential participants. This returned the researcher to the framework of phenomenology for guidance on the way forward.

It was decided to extend this study to include SF parental bereavement which like spousal bereavement support in the SF context is noticeable by an apparent lack of an evidence base to guide professional practice. For the next phase the potential participant population was extended to include the parents of SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan.

Phase 2: Bereaved parents

A literature review of parental military bereavement identified a limited number of studies for combat deaths but similar gaps in the literature for bereaved SF parents. This strategy was successful in recruiting two parents to the study, however, soon after providing informed consent the two participants withdrew from the study for private reasons.

Whilst it is unfortunate in one way that this study did not recruit participants it was nevertheless important to continue to understand the phenomena of the lived bereavement experiences in a SF context. Qualitative research encourages the researcher to understand the whole story of the phenomena of interest and the absence of participants became a story in itself.

It presented an opportunity for further research to examine possible explanations for failure to recruit spouses and for the attrition of parents in this study. Consequently, this study moved forward with the purpose redefined to the development of an understanding of what has happened in this study and how it has happened. This element of the study can be construed as a new emerging phenomena which may assist

in understanding that which can be learned from the problems in recruitment of spouses and parent in the SF context.

In order to identify the essence of the emerging phenomena my journey needed to return to the study itself and the inherent literature to analyse the information in accordance with the principles of qualitative data analysis. Consequently I determined that SF actually constitute a hard to reach population and that specific recruiting techniques are needed to encourage research participation.

This included the education of ethics review boards on the positive aspects of contact with the bereaved, and primary sampling by the principle researcher. My journey although challenging and complex provided me with the opportunity to better understand the difficulties of qualitative research with a vulnerable population and provided guidance for future research.

STRUCTURE

The structure of this thesis will reflect the two phases of this study (Figure 1). In Chapter 2, I present Phase 1 of the study which researches the lived experiences of spouses bereaved by the death of their husbands in combat in Afghanistan. It commences with the literature as it relates to traumatic, sudden and violent deaths, the public nature of a combat bereavement followed by a review on the relationship between social supports and bereavement outcomes. The remaining sections of Chapter 2 provide a review of the literature on those unique aspects of responses to military combat deaths. This is followed by a review of literature on disenfranchised grief which was a potential risk factor raised by the Australian National Audit Office (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013) and outlined in the background of Chapter 1.

Within Phase 1 the literature review is followed by the research design for Phase 1 including the methodology and sections on phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. This section also articulates the ethical considerations of research with this particular population. Following this I present the research methodology as it relates to spouse participants and although there was no data collected, an overview of the intended data collection and data analysis processes is presented. This includes the seven steps of the Moustakas modified van Kaam analysis framework.

In Chapter 3, I present Phase 2 of the study including a literature review relating to parental bereavement as a consequence of a military death. I outline the research methodology with research participants described as the parents of SF members killed

in combat in Afghanistan. When parent participants withdrew from the study soon after recruitment, the purpose of the study changed once more to focus on the challenges of recruitment of participants to this study.

In Chapter 4, I present the thematic information analysis of the study including a step by step description of the Moustakas modified van Kamm analysis model. This is followed by an explanation of the emergent themes from the analysis and concludes with a discussion on research rigour and the concepts involved in the trustworthiness of research. In Chapter 5, I return to the aforementioned research assumptions to examine and reflect on the position of those assumptions within this study. This is followed by a comprehensive discussion on the four themes which emerged from the information analysis in Chapter 4. There is an additional discussion on potential strategies to enhance recruitment in the SF context. Chapter 6 is the final chapter and presents the limitations of the study, the conclusion and the recommendations for future research.

BACKGROUND

In war, deaths are anticipated and to date, there have been 41 ADF deaths in Afghanistan (Lewis, 2014; Norton, 2013a) and of these the Special Forces have sustained 21 deaths. With the exception of one death, the SF deaths have been sudden and violent combat deaths as opposed to non-combat and/or accidental death within an area of operations and all have involved the death of young adult males. For the purposes of this study, a combat death is defined as a death which has resulted from battle injuries such as gunshot, Improvised Explosive Devices (IED), rocket propelled grenade injuries and sniper fire. Fatal injuries sustained in combat can include internal injuries, amputations and traumatic brain injuries. Consequently, there may be traumatic or complicated elements to the grief of the affected families. For this study combat deaths will encompass deaths that occurred during Australia's operational period 2001 – 2014 all of which are considered sudden, violent and traumatic.

There is extensive literature available on the impact of loss and the associated grief reactions of bereaved persons (McKissock & McKissock, 1995; Neimeyer, Keesee, & Fortner, 2000; Rando, 1993; Raphael, Stevens, & Dunsmore, 2006; Shuchter & Zisook, 2006; Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 2004; Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 2006; Weiss, 2004; Wilson & Supiano, 2011) and there is considerable research on the impact of sudden, violent deaths on bereavement outcomes (Jacobs,

Mazure, & Prigerson, 2000; Kristensen, Weisaeth, & Heir, 2012; Leichtentritt, Leichtentritt, Barzilai, & Pedatsur-Sukenik, 2013; Raphael, Stevens, et al., 2006; Rubin, Malkinson, & Witztum, 2000; Salloum & Rynearson, 2006). However, research into the impact of a combat death on the bereaved is more limited (Frye, 2012; Harrington LaMorie, 2011; Harrington LaMorie & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011; Holmes, Rauch, & Cozza, 2013; Jennings, 2013; Leichtentritt et al., 2013; Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 1999) and for the Australian SF there is no known research which could add to the literature to guide policy and practice guidelines for bereavement support within the ADF.

Professional experience of this researcher, as a military social worker, indicates that the bereavement of spouses of ADF members killed in combat differs from the bereavement associated with a traumatic non-combat death such as suicide or car accident. Experience in SF social work indicates that the unique subculture and social systems of the SF may influence bereavement particularly in the context of research indicating the mutually beneficial nature of social networks and the interactive role of social support (Olssen, 1997).

Researcher experience as an embedded social worker with SF provided considerable insight into the role of social support by the SF community when needs arise within that community. In terms of bereavement interventions it is the extant military policies for SF which determine who provides the support and how, where and when that support is provided (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013). Military policy also guides the notification process; determines support eligibility and guides the rituals such as the repatriation ceremony and a military funeral. These policies together with NOK experiences around viewing of deceased members appear to interact with or are influencing factors on bereavement outcomes.

Nonetheless, these experiences may have provided the researcher with practice wisdom but in order to identify evidence to guide best practice for spousal bereavement support this researcher sought reliable information on combat related spousal bereavements. Most of the studies around combat death have been conducted in Israel with the focus being on parents of Israeli soldiers (Harrington LaMorie & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011; Kristensen et al., 2012; Purisman & Maoz, 1977) and the disenfranchised girlfriends of fallen Israeli soldiers (Leichtentritt et al., 2013).

The findings from these mainly qualitative studies suggested that parents of deceased Israeli soldiers suffered social isolation (Purisman & Maoz, 1977) and were

at increased risk of prolonged grief (Kristensen et al., 2012; Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 1999) and depression. For bereaved girlfriends there was a strong element of disenfranchised grief with the significant factors being a lack of social support, isolation, loneliness and loss of future opportunities (Leichtentritt et al., 2013).

In the USA, the recent studies involving non-SF combat deaths and related bereavements identified significant psychosocial issues and social support challenges including isolation and extreme distress (Frye, 2012). A number of emerging themes depicting the influencing factors on grief were also identified. These included the notification process, the family relationships with the military, the violent nature of the death and communication issues (Jennings, 2013).

For other U.S. studies the literature on this topic is limited to parents, children (Holmes et al., 2013), young adult children (Morina, von Lersner, & Prigerson, 2011), comrades of veterans (Harrington LaMorie & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011), and spouses of ex-military members (Wilson & Supiano, 2011) with inconsistent findings. However, a large longitudinal study is currently underway in the USA on the bereavement experiences in about 3,000 military families and the subsequent impact of death on these families (Jowers, 2011). All types of military deaths will be considered, including combat deaths, and the subjects will be spouses and extended family. It is anticipated that considerable meaningful data may be available to guide policy and practice at least in a U.S. military context.

A United Kingdom (U.K.) Forces Support scoping study into the social support needs of bereaved families (Rolls & Chowns, 2011) identified the significant lack of evidence drawn from the experiences of bereaved military families which may identify the challenges of such bereavement and provide guidance to helping and support organisations to implement support programs.

In all of these aforementioned studies into combat bereavement the social supports, including practical support and the social interactions of the bereaved, have been recognized as having an impact, be it positive or negative, on bereavement outcomes. For example, although it is assumed that social support shields against negative consequences of a loss (Stroebe, Zech, Stroebe, & Abakoumkin, 2005) other findings suggest that in violent deaths the quality of social supports can lead to the disintegration of relationships (Breen and O'Connor 2011), feelings of abandonment and, disenfranchisement on the part of the bereaved (Armour 2002).

Whilst the findings have varied, it is nevertheless well documented (Rosenblatt, 2006) that grief is shaped by social and cultural contexts and that such contexts are important in understanding a lived experience of bereavement. It is also believed that the perceived meaning of social support, whether the support is perceived as needed and helpful or unwanted and non-helpful, can have an impact on the acceptance of, or desire for, continued social support (Breen & O'Connor, 2011).

There is little known evidence on the impact of social support and social interactions on the bereavement processes of Australian SF widowed spouses nor is there any known available evidence of what bereavement experiences look like in the context of a SF environment. Despite the challenges of limited research, contemporary social constructionist theory (Neimeyer et al., 2000) suggests that the social constructs or description and beliefs around the notions of a SF combat soldier and the bereaved spouses' constructs of life as a SF spouse could be important in ascertaining the most appropriate form of bereavement support for bereaved Australian SF widows.

Within the Australian Department of Defence the model of bereavement support for military next of kin, including SF families who have suffered a traumatic combat loss, is the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) bereavement support program. The online DCO documentation on services offered after an ADF death (Department of Defence, 2014) does not appear to delineate between combat and non-combat bereavement and circumstances of death in terms of policy guidance for practitioners providing bereavement support

A recent audit by the ANAO (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013) of governance and coordination of such support to bereaved Defence families identified three key stakeholders in the Defence support response to the death of an ADF member, namely; Command, Chaplains and the DCO Bereavement Support Team. The identified program emphasises a model of social support consisting of provision of advice and guidance to the NOK and immediate family, assistance to Command and liaison with Chaplains. Furthermore, the emphasis appears to be on the provision of consistent service delivery in bereavements and the practical aspects of funeral arrangements (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013).

The ANAO audit likewise outlined a number of other important features of the bereavement support responses within Defence and provided an analysis of the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders to Defence and to the NOK and family of the deceased member (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013). The audit report commented on a

possible perceived inconsistency in bereavement support in the case of some significant relationships of deceased ADF members such as girlfriends and defacto partners. The audit drew attention to State legislation on recognition of such partnerships and highlighted the need to consider the potential to exclude non-Defence recognised partners in the provision of bereavement support. Whilst the ANAO did not provide literature to substantiate risks of potential disenfranchisement, there is evidence available identifying poor bereavement outcomes due to non-engagement of support systems with girlfriends of deceased soldiers (Leichtentritt et al., 2013).

The ANAO made reference to the particular bereavement support model of brief intervention and referral to community agencies. This model of referral appears to rely on community agencies having evidence based policies in relation to combat bereavements that includes SF (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013).

The assessment by the ANAO on the bereavement support model highlights the importance of evidence based policy in guiding practitioners in understanding the dynamics, the dimensions and the context of combat related grief. However, it is not sufficient for evidence based policy to build only upon traditional paradigms of bereavement support and overlook or discount the contextual components of grief and bereavement associated with being the next of kin of an Australian SF soldier.

Without sufficient evidence derived from the experiences of bereaved SF spouses, evidence based bereavement support which reflects the cultural, social, institutional and environmental experiences of the bereaved is not possible. It is this context and in the absence of an evidence based model of bereavement support that the main research question for this study was developed: What were the lived bereavement experiences and perceptions of social support of spouses of SF members killed in combat?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived bereavement experiences including social support of widows of Australian SF members who were killed in combat whilst serving in Afghanistan on Operation Slipper 2001 – 2014. Through the use of purposeful criterion sampling it was hoped to recruit and conduct face to face interviews with spouses of the deceased SF members.

The development of an understanding of the lived experiences of the bereaved spouses will add to existing literature and consequently provide guidance to agencies involved in military bereavement support. It may also assist in the development of

evidence based professional practitioner's manuals for social workers and military leaders providing bereavement support to NOK and families in the SF context.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In the event of a combat death in the ADF it is the Defence Social Worker and a Military Support Officer who form the bereavement support team to represent Command in providing support to the NOK and immediate family of deceased ADF members (Department of Defence, 2014). An ANAO analysis suggests there is a lack of differentiation in bereavement support related to combat deaths and that which is provided to bereaved families grieving as a result of non-combat deaths. This situation may be consequential to a possible underlying theoretical and practice framework assumption that bereavement remains the same regardless of cause of death. For example, the assumption that traumatic and non-traumatic deaths in the context outlined by the ANAO are considered to have the same psychological reactions in the bereaved. Additionally these assumptions reflect the absence of sufficient studies which could provide contextual awareness and understanding for the provision of such support.

Existing research into bereavement associated with violent and traumatic deaths provides some insight into reactions to traumatic deaths and there may be some similarities with grief associated with combat deaths. However, military social work practitioners have an ethical responsibility to provide support which is grounded in evidence. Otherwise, there is the risk that some spouses, partners or parents of SF members killed in action may be harmed or become disenfranchised from the grieving process.

At this stage, holistic evidence does not exist to guide policy and practice within a service delivery model for SF bereavement support. There is no literature available that recognises the voice of the bereaved in the SF context. This study therefore can make a significant step forward in the understanding of lived bereavement experiences including social support. This is particularly important given assertions by Parkes (2001) that well-founded evidence based professional practice is an essential component of ethical bereavement interventions.

Additionally, this study will make significant contributions to the development of military leadership's understanding of the impact of military rituals such as repatriation ceremonies and military funerals on the bereavement process and

bereavement outcomes. It can provide insight into the bereavement experiences of SF widows through the understanding of the social context within which the widows grieve. It may also provide insight into the significant care and support required for spouses wishing to view the remains of their battle injured loved one.

SIGNIFICANCE TO MILITARY COMMANDERS

Defence bereavement support policy (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013) indicates that the primary responsibility for bereavement support to NOK lies with the Commanding Officer (CO) and the Unit to which the deceased member was attached at time of death. The support to families provided by Command includes practical, social, emotional and informative support.

For military funerals it is the CO who assumes overall responsibility for the organisation of the military aspects including rituals such as gun carriages, uniformed bearer parties, gun volleys and floral tributes, in accordance with family wishes (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013). However as outlined in the literature review within Chapter 2, there are significant influencing factors which may impact on the bereaved in terms of support requested, support needed, support available and the social and cultural context of the grief.

In order to provide an honourable, respectful and dignified bereavement response which has a positive impact on the grieving process and long term bereavement outcomes it is essential that Command be provided with appropriate, contemporary evidence based guidance in the execution of these important duties. Significant steps forward can then be made in the provision of bereavement support which meets the cultural, social, and emotional needs in the environmental context of the SF and extended SF families. As Parkes (2001) asserts, the provision of bereavement services is unethical if not based on well-founded inquiry.

RESEARCH APPROACH

In determining the appropriate approach to research it is critical to first consider the research purpose. For this study the initial purpose was to understand the lived bereavement experiences including social support of widows of Australian SF members who were killed in combat. Inherent in this purpose is the concept of bereavement experiences as lived and articulated by the spouses themselves. In terms of traditional bereavement research considerable weight has been placed on quantitative

research using the psychometric measurement of grief whereby data is analysed in terms of testing predetermined hypotheses. Although there is an important place for quantitative research in the study of bereavement outcomes, particularly through mixed method studies, the lived experiences of the bereaved can only be understood through the narrative of and dialogue with the bereaved themselves. Figure 2 depicts the journey into this phenomenological study thus far and illustrates the return to the phenomenological framework for guidance on the way forward to Phase 1.

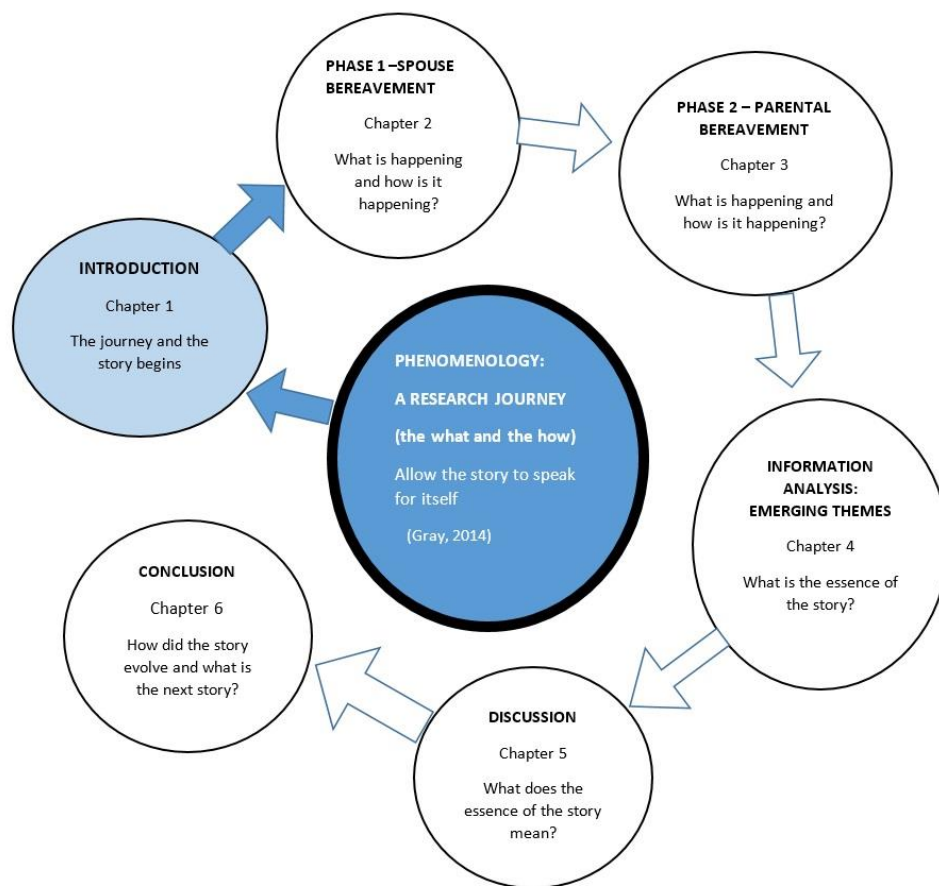


Figure 2. The journey and the story as it progresses to Chapter 2

Military families including SF families are unique and whilst some of the social experiences can be quantitatively measured, for example number of deployments, number of postings and number of soldiers killed and satisfaction with bereavement

support the actual experiences cannot. Hence, the purpose of this study lends itself to a qualitative approach.

This research utilised the collection of narrative information to understand the perspective of individuals experiencing a certain phenomenon. A qualitative phenomenological research approach was considered appropriate for this study which was based on understanding the phenomena of the lived experiences of spouses and parents of Australian SF members KIA.

Without an understanding of the lived experience of the bereaved families of SF members KIA it is extremely difficult to progress from a framework of traditional military bereavement support based on the predominant and well known features of a powerful bureaucratic organisation to a more contemporary research to practice paradigm. The need for this progress in the military bereavement context is well identified in a report on the bureaucratic organisational responses to military deaths (Bartone & Ender, 1994). The authors identified the reduction of or relief from the pain of grief, the facilitation of healthy outcomes and the facilitation of meaning-making as the principle objectives in U.S. military bereavement support policy.

Whilst it is positive that the U.S. military would strive to achieve healthy bereavement outcomes it is nonetheless debatable that the relief from the pain of grief is a well-founded practice in bereavement support. Contemporary views premise grief work on the need to experience the pain as part of the healing process (McKissock & McKissock, 1995; Weiss, 2006) and Bartone and Ender (1994) do caution on the risk of unfounded policies contributing to poor bereavement outcomes.

Often in such organisations measurement of effective service delivery including bereavement support is the quantitative ratings of client satisfaction. Nevertheless, as Schut and Stroebe (2011) assert a bereavement intervention may be articulated by the bereaved on a rating scale for example, as being satisfactory, however that does not mean it is effective. Additionally, in terms of understanding bereavement experiences it is the view of other researchers (Breen & O'Connor, 2007; Neimeyer & Hogan, 2004) that more attention needs to be allocated to understanding grief in a contextual framework.

To understand grief in social and cultural contexts for example requires a research approach which values the perceptions the bereaved have of their own cultural heritage and experiences and of their positioning within their own social systems. Hence for this study it was necessary to adopt an approach which enabled participants to

articulate the socio-cultural aspects of SF families as experienced by themselves and the influence these concepts may have had on their grief.

Having acknowledged the place of quantitative research in the study of bereavement this researcher nonetheless chose the narrative of lived experiences as the starting point for this study. The intended framework for this qualitative study was the Moustakas (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach which focuses on the experience of the participants rather than the researcher and participant experiences. This approach also allows for extraction and analysis of themes from the interview narrative (Moustakas, 1994). Whilst the recruitment of potential participants was a major challenge it had been intended to use semi-structured face to face interviews as the method of data collection. Data analysis was to use the Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam seven step method of analysis of phenomenological data which will be further explained later in this chapter.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology has been defined as a research approach which investigates the common meanings of experiences as depicted by the individuals in the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013) with the intent of understanding the essence of the studied phenomena (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). It attempts to understand a social construct or the “what” and “how” of an experience as perceived by the participants in a specific social context (Creswell, 2009). In terms of the “what” and “how” for this study the exploration of bereavement including social support experiences asks what did the participants experience (Lowe, 2005) when their husbands were killed in combat? And, how was it experienced? (Moustakas, 1994).

There are researchers who consider that methodological pluralism in the study of grief is more appropriate than traditional quantitative methods alone which fail to capture the essence of the lived experience depicted in qualitative analysis (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2004). By using a mixed method approach Neimeyer and Hogan (2004) argue that bereavement experiences can be understood from two different perspectives - a qualitative approach which identifies the dominant discourse of the bereaved experiences including themes and meanings which reflect the views of the bereaved followed by a quantitative element of measurement to provide additional information. Despite the advantages of a mixed methods approach it was beyond the scope of this study which was aimed at the lived experience.

As previously explained, qualitative phenomenological research differs from traditional research. The aim is not to measure grief and bereavement outcomes but rather phenomenological research is concerned with an individual's lived experiences and personal perspectives of a specific phenomenon. In contrast for example, a qualitative narrative approach whilst emphasising the importance of an individual's experiences is more expansive. It explores the life story of a participant. For non-traditional military members and their families, such as those of SF who have remained secretive, mysterious and enigmatic it is the non-traditional approach of phenomenology which allows for the understanding of experiences as articulated by the families themselves.

Within a phenomenological framework there are a number of methodological approaches which aim to understand the lived experience with hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology being two of the major approaches (Creswell, 2013). A hermeneutic phenomenological approach has at its core the lived experiences of both participant and researcher. The researcher brings to the study their own experiences of the specific phenomena and uses these experiences to help explore the participants' experiences. Interpretation or meanings of the experiences are considered more important than descriptions of the experience. The model of inquiry adopted and which is best suited to guide this study is Moustakas transcendental phenomenology (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas Transcendental phenomenology

Transcendental phenomenology as for most phenomenology approaches has its origins in German philosophy (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004) and has the reflections or meanings of a lived experience as its core. It is transcendental because it moves beyond (transcends) the everyday experience of a phenomena to a fresh new approach whereby the researcher experiences the narrated phenomena as though for the first time (Moustakas, 1994). It focuses on the research participant's experience of specific phenomena which in this study were the bereavement experiences related to a SF combat death. It is unlimited in its sphere of inquiry and it encourages acts of the human conscious such as hearing, seeing and imagining to provide additional information (Perry, 2013).

The aim of transcendental phenomenology is to develop a comprehensive representation of the phenomenon being studied and to formulate a more inclusive

social knowledge base (Conklin, 2007) which then adds to the literature and guides professionals in the implementation of evidence based practice. Thus, for this study a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of bereaved SF spouses was sought which included the participant's experiences with notification, repatriation, viewing and funerals. In addition, by understanding the participants' perceptions of social support in these experiences it was anticipated that an all-inclusive knowledge base would add to the literature and consequently would direct future bereavement support in the SF context.

There are a number of transcendental approaches to phenomenological research interviews. Perry (2013) describes a transcendental approach in which interview questions during the narrative consider the various contexts of the phenomena. For example, the cognitive context could be framed around the lead up to a participant's decision to have a full military funeral; for the situational context such as the notification of the death the participant could be asked to discuss how they became aware that their loved had been killed; for the developmental context a question may be asked about whether any past experiences influenced the decision to view their loved one's remains.

The methodology of transcendental phenomenology as proposed by Moustakas (1994) and the approach utilised in this study has a more systematic step by step approach which assists in limiting the influence of personal judgements on the interpretations of experiences. Transcendental phenomenology was considered appropriate for this research because of its emphasis on the lived experiences of participants as opposed to hermeneutic phenomenology which concentrates to a greater extent on the attention the researcher pays to their own personal experiences, reflections and interpretations of the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2013).

Two important aspects of transcendental phenomenological research relevant to this study are the concepts of epoche (bracketing) and the particular data analysis procedure preferred by Moustakas (Creswell, 2013). For epoche, researchers put aside (bracket) personal perspectives and presuppositions to gain a new understanding or perspective of the phenomena being studied, in this case combat related bereavement (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche allows for the essence of the phenomena to be presented without adornment. Moustakas (1994) considered epoche as the fundamental step in the research process and vital to isolating the biases of the researcher.

One method for achieving this and the one which this researcher adopted was the maintenance of a reflective journal (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The researcher engaged in self-reflection regarding the specific phenomenon under study and entered these thoughts in a journal for referral before and during the recruitment phase of the research. The inability of this study to recruit or retain participants meant that any preconceptions that may impact on data analysis were not tested.

Moustakas modified van Kaam method of analysis

The other important aspect of transcendental phenomenology, the Moustakas modified van Kaam method of data analysis, was introduced into phenomenology by Moustakas as a method of reducing all the information from an interview into significant statements (Creswell, 2013). It was originally developed in the 1950's as a six step systematic method for phenomenological analyses (Anderson & Eppard, 1998) and is considered essential for capturing the essence or characteristic shared qualities of a phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Whilst the original van Kaam method is complex it was modified by Moustakas and is now known as the Moustakas modified van Kaam seven step method of analysis. This modified method is appropriate for all levels of research and it incorporates step by step instructions to extract emerging themes and ideas from the participant narratives. This process is provided in greater detail in Chapter 2.

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

An important element of research is the declaration by the researchers of assumptions which are held to be true and which can influence a researcher's view of the presenting data (Patton, 2002). The clinical experience of the researcher as a military social worker has led to a number of assumptions regarding bereavement experiences and associated social support of spouses and parents of SF members killed in combat.

The first assumption was that potential participants would be interested in joining the research and discussing their lived experiences of SF combat related bereavement. The second assumption was that despite the cultural elements of SF and their families of which I was cognisant I assumed that having worked as an embedded social worker with SF would make it easier for potential participants to make contact.

I also assumed that my affiliation with SF would encourage a snowball effect should only one participant be identified. The snowball sampling strategy in research is the effect of obtaining additional participants by means of participants referring other individuals or their friends in the same population about the study and their involvement (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

The third assumption involves the use of an intermediary as the recruiter for the research. I assumed that the positive relationship which exists between the potential participants and the agency would have a positive effect on recruitment. The final assumption relates to the view inherent in phenomenological research that the lived experience of participants is a true reflection of the actual lived experience. In bereavement research there is line of argument (Grant, 2014) that the lived experience narrative in qualitative research as articulated by a participant is based on an assumption that the narrative is trustworthy and accurately reflects the participants experiences. It may be that the lived expression is recalled by a participant who was suffering immense grief when the memories were being formed. These assumptions will be reconsidered in the final analysis in Chapter 7.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The bereavement experiences which an individual has lived through in regards to being part of a specific culturally and socially unique group such as the SF is central to phenomenological analysis. As a research paradigm, phenomenology allows the researcher to explore the unique individual perspectives of specific phenomena which for this study were initially spousal bereavement experienced as a result of a traumatic military combat death and the experiences of social supports within and external to the ADF. In this context the main research question was:

1. What do the lived bereavement experiences and perceptions of social support of spouses of SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan look like?

However, difficulties in the recruitment of potential spouse participants required the Study to move to Phase 2 and the research question to be expanded to include the following:

2. What do the lived bereavement experiences and perceptions of social support of parents of Australian SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan look like?

The study was successful in recruiting two potential participants, however, with the withdrawal of the two parents the study returned to the principles of phenomenology

and Gray's (2014) advice to let the story tell itself. This led to the emergence of a new phenomenon, that being the "what" and the "how" of unsuccessful recruiting in the SF context.

BEREAVEMENT DEFINITIONS

Bereavement literature tends to interchangeably use the terms of grief, loss, bereavement and mourning. This study will use the following definitions articulated by leading researchers in the field (Stroebe et al., 2004);

Bereavement: The state of having suffered the loss of a significant loved one.

Grief: The primary emotional response to loss.

Mourning: The social and cultural expressions of grief.

THE WAY FORWARD

The deployment of significant numbers of SF troops to Afghanistan as part Australia's contribution to the post 9/11 War on Terrorism has thus far resulted in 41 deaths and 21 of these deaths were sustained by the SF contingent. The experiences of this researcher in bereavement support and the dearth of evidence to guide bereavement support in this context has led to this study.

The journey of this researcher has been outlined and identifies the significant challenges in phenomenological studies which influenced the implementation of a three phase research study. For all phases of this study a qualitative transcendental phenomenological framework has been identified as the appropriate research approach to understand the lived experiences of spouses bereaved by the death of their SF partners in combat in Afghanistan. Chapter 2 will introduce Phase 1 of the study and a literature review is presented in the context of SF combat deaths and subsequent bereavement support. The research design and methods identify the specific processes including ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 2: PHASE 1 – SF SPOUSAL BEREAVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

As depicted in Figure 3, Chapter 2 presents Phase 1 of the study which articulates the research processes involved in the examination of the lived experiences of spouses bereaved by the death of a SF member killed in combat in Afghanistan.

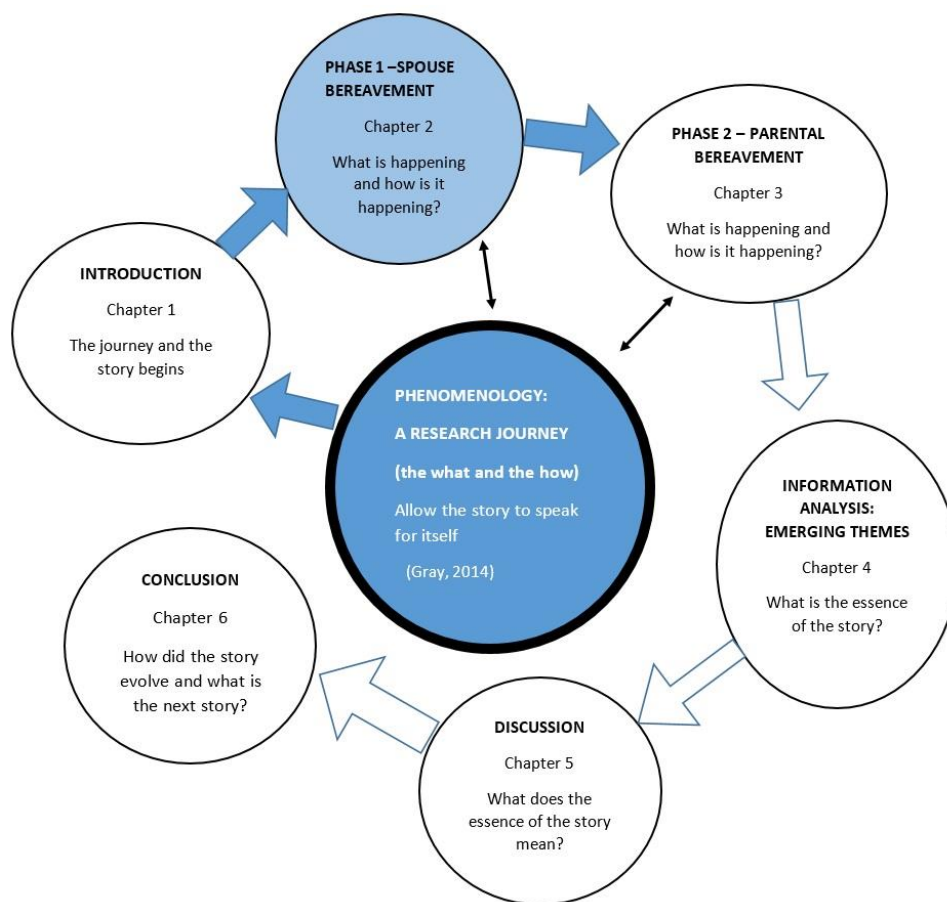


Figure 3. Phase 1: The research journey for SF spousal bereavement study

Chapter 2 begins with the purpose of the study and a comprehensive review of the literature relating to non-SF combat deaths. This is followed by literature relating to traumatic and violent deaths, public bereavement, social support in bereavement, notification of a military death, repatriation of human remains, viewing of the body, the funeral and disenfranchised grief. The research design is then presented including

the ethical considerations important to implementing this study. The research methods follow with an explanation of the ethical approvals process for this study. Whilst this study failed to recruit bereaved SF spouses the final section of this chapter nevertheless provides insight into the methods of data collection and analysis which were intended. This includes the Moustakas' modified van Kaam method of analysis and the NVivo10 software platform for the data analysis.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived bereavement experiences including social support of widows of Australian SF members who were killed in combat whilst serving in Afghanistan. Through the use of purposeful criterion sampling it was hoped to recruit and conduct face to face interviews with spouses of the deceased SF members.

The development of an understanding of the lived experiences of the bereaved spouses will add to existing literature which subsequently may guide agencies involved in military bereavement support to develop appropriate, evidence based professional practitioner's manuals for social workers providing bereavement support in the SF context. It may also guide the development of best practice manuals for SF military leaders in the provision of bereavement support of NOK and SF members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This phenomenological approach to understanding the bereavement experiences of Australian SF spouses as depicted in Chapter 1 originated from the fact that there is no known available literature on the impact of Australian SF combat deaths on spousal bereavement. Nor is there literature available on the experiences of the bereavement as narrated by the bereaved SF spouses themselves which could guide policy and practice in ADF bereavement support. This significant gap in knowledge prevents both military leadership and allied support personnel from providing a level of bereavement support which accurately reflects the needs of those Australian SF widows.

Considerable literature is available on the various components of grief and loss and the impact on bereavement processes and outcomes in the general field of bereavement support. This available literature extensively covers aspects of grief, loss, mourning and bereavement including traditional and contemporary theoretical perspectives (Epstein, 2006; Hibberd, 2013; McKissock & McKissock, 2003; Raphael, Stevens, et

al., 2006; Stroebe & Schut, 2004a; Stroebe, Stroebe, et al., 2006; Worden, 2002), normal grief reactions (Bonanno, 2004; McKissock & McKissock, 1995; Shuchter & Zisook, 2006), adjustments and resilience to loss (Bonanno, 2004; Wortman, Silver, & Kessler, 2006) the measurement of grief (Hansson, Carpenter, & Fairchild, 2006) and, treatments or interventions in grief (McKissock & McKissock, 2003; Raphael, Middleton, Martinek, & Misso, 2006; Worden, 2002).

There are consistent views among researchers that grief occurs in a social and cultural context. The expression of grief is considered by many to be individualistic (McKissock & McKissock, 2003; Worden, 2002) whilst being influenced by factors such as age, personality, gender, health, prior trauma (McKissock & McKissock, 2003), coping styles and specific risk factors, social supports and, societal acknowledgements (Breen & O'Connor, 2011; Leichtentritt et al., 2013; Leichtentritt & Pedatsur-Sukenik, 2012; Stroebe & Schut, 2004a; Stroebe, 2009; Vachon & Stylianos, 1988). Furthermore there is considerable evidence to suggest that bereavement outcomes are also significantly influenced by the type, cause or context of the death (McKissock & McKissock, 2003; Rando, 1993; Raphael, Middleton, et al., 2006; Stroebe & Schut, 2004c).

A very limited number of American studies exist on the lived experiences of bereaved spouses of U.S. partners killed in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan (Frye, 2012; Jennings, 2013). Apart from these two studies by Frye (2012) and Jennings (2013) on spousal bereavement related to non-SF combat deaths the closest types of death to a SF combat death would be non-military sudden traumatic and violent deaths as discussed below.

The dominant defining characteristic of the SF deaths in Afghanistan is that these deaths are war time deaths of young adult males occurring during combat and in terms of Australian forces are often reported in a public domain. Hence, in terms of combat deaths of Australian SF personnel, the literature which examines the impact of sudden and traumatic deaths such as homicide, suicide and car/motorcycle accidents on family bereavement (Armour, 2002; Breen & O'Connor, 2011; Kristensen et al., 2012; Pearlman & Wortman, 2014) suggests that the closest experience to death resulting from a combat death would be grief resulting from sudden, violent and traumatic death. The act of homicide is possibly the closest to that of death in war. Thus for this study a review of relevant literature for traumatic and violent deaths will be included.

With respect to the SF, the significant gap in the literature relating to combat death comprises not only the violence and trauma aspects but also those aspects which are unique to the military and the SF. There is literature which depicts the unique nature of military and military family environments and structures (Harrington LaMorie, 2011; Harrington LaMorie & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011), the psychosocial and cognitive profiles of bereaved spouses in the context of traumatic death in the U.S. military, however, there is no known literature which isolates Australian SF combat deaths in the study of the lived experiences of spousal bereavement.

Practice experience by the researcher indicates that whilst SF share some of the unique aspects of general military units such as rules, ranks, traditions and comradeship, the SF have a culture which is unique from all other military units. Experience of the researcher also suggests that a unique social support system exists in the SF community network environment. This together with the military rituals and processes which occur after a combat death may be significant in the experiences of spouses bereaved by a SF combat death.

Non-SF combat deaths

With respect to the limited literature that focuses specifically on military deaths in a war zone both combat (battle) and non-combat (such as accident during force preparations) the findings tend to be inconclusive. Some literature (Kristensen et al., 2012) indicates that war deaths, whilst mostly sudden and violent, can be unique for reasons such as delays in notification, failure to find the human remains and subsequent delays in arranging funerals (Harrington LaMorie, 2011). Additionally, battle deaths are often preceded by a long absence from home and loved ones. The deaths almost always involve young adult males and are often considered heroic acts by the bereaved (Beder, 2003). Additionally, the deaths may be expected or considered inevitable as a consequence of being a soldier (Harrington LaMorie & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011).

In terms of studies related specifically to combat deaths most of the studies have focused on Israeli war deaths with the bereaved being parents (Harrington LaMorie, 2011; Kristensen et al., 2012; Leichtentritt et al., 2013; Purisman & Maoz, 1977) and disenfranchised girlfriends of Israeli soldiers killed in in a number of wars involving Israel (Leichtentritt et al., 2013). In terms of other international studies the majority of literature is from the United States.

Frye (2012) utilised the Dual Process Model Theory of grief as a theoretical tool to examine the lived experiences of a small sample of young widows bereaved by the combat death of their partners in Iraq and Afghanistan. Using a phenomenological approach, Frye (2012) found that bereavement experiences related to U.S. combat deaths were complex and influenced by factors such as the violent nature of the death; the fact the death was war related, the military socio-cultural environment and social support aspects such as financial support.

Frye (2012) also suggested that the young age of the widows and less life experience to face the challenges of widowhood were influencing factors on bereavement outcomes. These findings in part support considerable literature available (Raphael, Stevens, et al., 2006) on the impact of sudden violent deaths on grief and the role of type, cause and context of death in influencing bereavement outcomes (Breen, 2006; McKissock & McKissock, 2003). Nevertheless this study was limited by the fact the participants were all young and non-SF participants.

In a larger sample Jennings (2013) conducted a phenomenological study to examine 15 online narratives previously posted to a support site by widows with children from a partner who died in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. The main themes that emerged included the impact of notification including false notifications, building memories, honouring the dead and the influence of military policies, processes and culture on bereavement. Jennings (2013) considered the online narrative approach to be limiting in that the absence of a phenomenological interview limited the study to retrospective themes and prompts and follow ups could not be achieved as is the case in face to face interviews.

Harrington LaMorie (2011) reported from her research on military U.S. deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan and identified that there were considerable consequences for the bereaved families of U.S. Armed Forces KIA reported since 2001. This work was supported by findings of Frye (2012) and Jennings (2013). Besides the factors already known about the impact of violent deaths on the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved including the increased risk of PTSD, Harrington LaMorie (2011) also referred to the trauma of the notification process, the impact of the repatriation ceremony, the public grieving and the need to make quick and significant lifestyle changes such as housing, friendship networks and finances (Harrington LaMorie, 2011). These are traumatic situations which not only increase the vulnerability of the

NOK to psychological trauma but are experiences the bereaved of non-military or civilian families do not necessarily have face to face.

With respect to SF, all of the identified literature on combat deaths did not delineate between SF and non-SF bereavement outcomes although Frye (2012) considered it important that future research on combat bereavement should consider examining SF deaths. In doing so Frye (2013) emphasised the differences in culture, philosophies, and perspectives of war between SF and non-SF and considered this may impact on bereavement outcomes.

Sudden and violent deaths

A sudden and violent death is one which is not anticipated, occurs without warning and involves trauma to the body or mutilation (Raphael, Stevens, et al., 2006) and is often depicted as gruesome and shocking (Raphael, Minkov, & Dobson, 2004). It usually refers to homicide, suicide, disasters and accidents and is sometimes used interchangeably with the term traumatic death.

In general bereavement literature combat deaths are usually referred to as war deaths and included in the same category as sudden, violent and traumatic deaths. Whilst a combat death does include similar descriptive features as for example a homicide there are additional factors which can impact on bereavement (Rando, 1993). These include the viewpoints the deceased and the bereaved had on the morality and rationale for war (Beder, 2003), the politics of being at war, the family stress during the deployment prior to death, perceptions of the enemy (Raphael, Stevens, et al., 2006), delays in notification of death (Kristensen et al., 2012) and the NOK experiences of war (Rando, 1993).

Related to these socio-cultural viewpoints of death is the assertion (Abramovitch, 2000) that a specific death is a traumatic or violent death depending on the viewpoint of the death as either a *good or bad* death. Whilst stipulating that lived experiences of bereavement are unique Abramovitch (2000) identified a number of cultural viewpoints of what is a good or bad death. He reported for example that for Hindus a good death occurs at the right place at the right time and is voluntary whereas a bad death is one in which there is no self-sacrifice of life. For the Jewish culture a good death is death not prolonged, occurring on a Tuesday and in the presence of kin. A bad death occurs as a result of bloodshed or if the body remains unburied. This suggestion by the Abramovitch (2000) comprehensive description of complex cultures stresses the

importance of understanding the socio-cultural contexts of the lived experiences of the bereaved. For some a traumatic death such as a combat death could be a good death whilst for others it may be a bad death.

The leading studies in the field of traumatic death and its impact on the bereaved have also examined psychological outcomes (Kristensen et al., 2012); psychiatric reactions (Clements, DeRanieri, Vigil, & Benasutti, 2004; Raphael et al., 2004; Stroebe & Schut, 1999); the factors enhancing resilience of the bereaved (Bonanno, 2004); family resilience (Salloum & Rynearson, 2006); risk factors linked to traumatic death including the suddenness and violent aspects (Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2006; Raphael et al., 2004) and psychosocial consequences of traumatic death (Purisman & Maoz, 1977).

A review of literature indicates that with sudden and violent deaths there is an increased risk of a poor bereavement outcome (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) including prolonged, complicated or exaggerated grief (Clements et al., 2004; Kristensen et al., 2012), Major Depressive Disorder (Middleton, Raphael, Martinek, & Misso, 2006); a tendency toward post-traumatic stress reactions (Rando, 1993), and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Middleton et al., 2006; Rando, 1993).

Overall, there is little reason to suggest that the general public would not consider a combat death as sudden, traumatic and violent. Further, this sudden level of violence and trauma perpetuated against healthy young adult males in support of a specific wartime mission partially leads the media to rightly or wrongly portray the death as a public tragedy and consequently the bereaved grieve in a public domain even if it is perceived to be used for political or circulation reasons.

Public bereavement

The press conferences which inform the public of a military combat death are usually undertaken by the Prime-Minister (PM), the Chief of Defence (CDF), and the Chief of Army (CA). As articulated by the specific speaker during these announcements the information provided on SF combat deaths and NOK bereavement responses is restricted for the protection of ongoing missions; the security of SF units and protection of the identities of SF. A few details of the death, the repatriation and the funeral ceremony are provided to limited media outlets. Nevertheless the media through ongoing coverage ensure that the nation's focus is on the death as a tragedy.

Consequently the mourning around these types of deaths become public (Doka, 2003b).

The literature on public mourning suggests that certain deaths are perceived as public tragedies (Doka, 2003b). The deaths of Princess Diana, John F Kennedy Jr, Nelson Mandela and more recently Phillip Hughes, the Australian cricketer who died from head injuries sustained while playing cricket, are examples depicted by the media as public tragedies. The media portrayals ensured that the nation and the world openly focused on considerable aspects of their lives, their deaths and the grief of their NOK.

Whilst there is the view that public tragedies have public rituals which play an important role in the validation of grief (Doka, 2003a) there remains the issue of the impact that public scrutiny of a loved one's death and funeral and the associated expression of grief may have on the bereavement outcome. Closely related to the concept of public mourning is the impact of the media intrusion in to the lives of the bereaved through the influence on and portrayal of public attitudes to war in 24 hour television news and public affairs shows (Rolls & Chowns, 2011).

Literature suggests that public portrayal of combat deaths can have a stressful impact on the private and personal grief of the NOK (Harrington LaMorie, 2011). There is the risk that this ongoing portrayal of the bereaved as grief-stricken may actually encourage external control of the grief and the bereaved then become victims.

However, given that SF soldiers and Officers are considered the elite force of the ADF it is not surprising the media portray deceased Australian SF members KIA as extremely brave fallen warriors and well-respected heroes. It is not known if this portrayal fits with the image that the bereaved NOK may have and whether this portrayal along with the media coverage acts as a reinforcer of the victim role or is a form of comfort or social support.

Notification

Notification of a death in the Australian military context is the process whereby Officers and Chaplains from the ADF are tasked with the unenviable duty of notifying the primary emergency contact and NOK of the death of their loved one (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013). In other countries whilst the importance, the significance and the sombre elements are similar the process may differ.

In the military context a number of notification studies (Cawkill, 2009) have identified the multi-layered role of the military hierarchy involved in the notification

process such that the delays in obtaining information on combat deaths and the military mortuary protocols actually delay the notification and consequently may have a negative impact on the bereavement outcomes.

The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) utilise reservist officers to undertake the notification and form a type of mobile bureaucracy which closes ranks around the bereaved and forms a protective social and cultural exclusion zone (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Ben-Ari, 2000). This allows the IDF to manage the subsequent responses of the bereaved within the structure of a bureaucracy. However, it may be that with all good intentions others take ownership of the grief experiences of the bereaved.

In the U.K. Armed Forces the casualty notification process is coordinated by a Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre (JCCC) and a notifying authority arranges the notification (Cawkill, 2009). The military take on a similar role to that of the IDF with the objectives appearing for all good intentions to be related to a desire to ease the pain of grief.

All of the available literature on the military notification processes reflect the viewpoints that notification of a death carries with it a profound responsibility. Notification can have a positive influence on bereavement outcomes if sensitively and appropriately managed but can also have significant consequences for the bereaved if inappropriately managed. A compassionate, timely, empathic and well communicated notification can assist the bereaved in adjusting to their loss (Fallowfield & Jenkins, 2004). Poorly delivered notifications can result in unfortunate long term bereavement outcomes including long lasting anger and resentment (Fallowfield & Jenkins, 2004) and prolonged or complicated grief (Janzen, Cadell, & Westhues, 2004).

In terms of best practice for notifications the literature provides considerable examples of protocols produced by or for Police Departments (Goodrum, 2005; Moldovan, 2009), health authorities (Raphael, Stevens, et al., 2006) and Defence establishments (Cawkill, 2009; Miller, 2008). These protocols and guidelines are founded on a variety of themes identified in the literature (Leash, 1994) which emphasize the importance of preparation and effective communication based on compassionate notification principles such as empathy, caring, accuracy and timeliness (Alexander & Klein, 2000); the needs and impact on notifiers (Stewart, Lord, & Mercer, 2001) and an understanding of the impact of poor notification on the bereavement process (Stewart, 1999).

Notification policies and protocols tend to concentrate on procedural basics such as the practical aspects of the delivery of bad news, the content of the news and the actual performance of the notifier (Morse, 2011). There are very few studies which provide evidence for best practice from the perspectives of the bereaved with the majority being in relation to delivery of bad news in hospitals and health settings. There are even less in relation to qualitative analysis of experiences of the bereaved.

It is noted that there are also differing views of who is best placed to deliver death notifications. In the hospital context for some families there was a preference for a physician to notify of death (Leash, 1994) whilst for others the preference was for a nurse to notify due to perceptions that nurses are more compassionate. For the ADF, the notification of a military death is conducted by a notification team with a military officer delivering the news accompanied by a Chaplain (Auditor-General 2011, p62).

In terms of the narrative of lived experiences of notification in the military context there is no known available literature which articulates the experience of notifications to NOK of SF bereaved by a combat death. However, there is evidence of considerable distress felt by families and NOK of the nine ADF members killed in 2005 when a RAN Sea King helicopter crashed on the island of Nias in Indonesia (Department of Defence, 2007). The subsequent Board of Inquiry (BOI) found that improvement should be made in the notification protocols to ensure notifications are timely and accurate. Although the accident was not combat related it nevertheless involved sudden, unexpected and violent deaths and was a reflection of the lived experiences of the NOK appearing at the BOI (Department of Defence, 2007).

With respect to non-SF combat deaths, the Jennings (2013) qualitative study with a number of non-SF widows identified the notification process as a confrontation with reality and the point their lives changed forever. There was disbelief, horror and shock. Jennings (2013) also identified an instance in which the knowledge that there have been false notifications influenced one widow's belief that her husband may still be alive. In her mind if the military has been wrong in the past then they could be wrong when she was notified. The practice experience of this researcher confirms views of non-military studies that the bereaved clearly remember the notification process.

Repatriation

Following the notification of a death of a military member in combat, the NOK begin their journey of grieving in the public domain and in conjunction with a number

of often unknown professionals and political identities. These may include Chaplains, Social Workers, Coronial staff and a range of military members including Commanding Officers, Service Chiefs and politicians including the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. This journey of grief after notification begins with the highly ritualistic military repatriation ceremony.

Repatriation for the ADF is the process of returning a deceased military member back to Australia from overseas or from a theatre of operation which for this study is Operation Slipper in Afghanistan. Media coverage of the 41 ADF deaths in Afghanistan demonstrate the ritualistic ceremonies associated with a combat death.

Whilst there are very limited findings on the impact of a repatriation ceremony on the bereavement there is evidence of the impact of rituals around violent deaths on the adjustment of bereaved including self-blame and survivor guilt (Raphael, Stevens, et al., 2006). There is also evidence that despite the moral obligation society has to repatriate the war dead with dignity and respect there have been times when bereaved family members have to face the horror of the wrong body being repatriated to Australia. This was the case for the remains of PTE Jake Kovco (Blenkin & Osborne, 2006) and in the case of the 2011 U.S. Air Force failure when poor repatriation practices resulted in the mutilation, mismanagement, and loss of body parts unbeknown to the family of the deceased (Carter, 2011).

Since the Australian episode with PTE Kovco's remains the ADF have reformed the processes for a repatriation so that the utmost care, compassion and dignity is afforded the deceased. Nevertheless, whilst these unfortunate incidents were not intentional they do exemplify the fact that the nature of the repatriation process could have an impact on long term bereavement outcomes such as PTSD (Rando, 1993).

Viewing

In the military context, the decision around viewing of a deceased member does, in my experience as a military social worker, often generate opinions similar to those depicted by Mowl (2011). There are family members who wish to view their loved one and there are supporters who recommend against it particularly when the death is combat related. There are NOK who wish they had been given the opportunity to view the body and regret they did not and there are those who do not regret either viewing or not viewing.

The impact of the deceased being a military member possibly adds to the complexities around viewing the deceased particularly given there are a number of processes which civilian deaths are not exposed to in the manner of a combat death. Family members have to wait for the body to leave the war zone and be repatriated home. In addition, soon after death a literal military curtain labelled by some as the “buffer zone” (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Ben-Ari, 2000) is built around grieving military families with the aim of rightly or wrongly protecting the family from outsiders and from the pains of grief. Within this buffer zone decisions are made which the military believe are in the best interests of the military and the family and this includes whether or not the family should view the body. These circumstances are most acute in the Israeli military context, however, most Western Defence organisations have similar interventions.

Nevertheless, a number of theoretical perspectives have been advanced to support the view that practitioners and support personnel should encourage the bereaved to view their loved one’s body. The reality of the death can be actualised and reinforced in order to accept the loss (Worden, 2002); continuing bonds with the deceased can be maintained (Chapple & Ziebland, 2010); psychological recovery can be enhanced (Worden 2002); there is verification of the fact that suffering has ceased (Chapple & Ziebland, 2010) and, meaning can be found in the reality, the relationship and the relinquishing of the body (Mowll, 2011). Memories can also be created (Hughes, Turton, Hopper, & Evans, 2002).

In terms of traumatic or violent deaths and viewing of the deceased although there is a significant gap in research, a number of studies have identified that the bereaved have a range of reasons for wanting to view their loved one. A qualitative study of the experiences of 80 individuals bereaved (Chapple & Ziebland, 2010) as a result of a traumatic death considered the reasons for the decisions made about viewing and the consequences of those decisions.

The findings supported the views that the bereaved have differing reasons for viewing. The bereaved wanted to ensure the right person had been identified; undertake religious or cultural rituals; say goodbye and to negate worse images from their mind (Chapple & Ziebland, 2010). Some felt they had a moral obligation or duty and others acted out of instinct or wanted to care for the deceased (Hoy, 2013).

A mixed methods study (Mowll, 2007) involved 25 individuals including spouses, parents and adult siblings who had been bereaved in sudden and traumatic

circumstances. The majority of the deaths were reported as suicide, homicide and accidents and the reasons participants gave for viewing included reinforcement of reality and to say goodbye to the deceased. These findings were similar to the findings of Chapple and Ziebland (2010).

A larger mixed methods study (Mowll, 2011) involved 64 bereaved participants grieving from the sudden and unexpected death of their relatives some 6 months earlier. Mowll (2011) raised the issue that advice from others can constrain the bereaved in their decision to view their relative's body. Mowll (2011) also discussed the need for support personnel to support the bereaved to make an informed decision on whether to view or not to view and to do so in the relative context.

With respect to negative outcomes a number of lived experiences have been documented in which bereaved family have described their feelings at being denied the right to view and hold the body of their loved one (Dix, 1998).

The UK Disaster Action agency, a charity which provides for the care of the bereaved and survivors of disasters has documented the traumatic grief that the bereaved continue to endure as a result of the actions of those who denied families the right without explanation to see the body of their loved one. Specific examples include bereavement experiences related to the 1988 Lockerbie air crash in Scotland and the 1988 Thames River boat accident (Dix, 1998).

Nevertheless, in instances where the survivors were encouraged to view the body such as the 1989 Hillsborough soccer stadium collapse in Liverpool UK the bereaved endured significant distress when advised they could basically 'look but not touch' the body of their loved one.

For SF bereaved spouses there is no known available researched experiential evidence available to guide practitioners on the support for the bereaved to view their loved one's body. The experiences of bereaved spouses who have endured loss from a combat death are important in ascertaining those practices which could reduce the distress of a combat death and lessen the risks of poor bereavement outcomes.

Finally, Mowll's (2011) findings that professionals need to determine the bereaved's personal preferences regarding their desire to view or not to view their loved one could have an important role in the education of military and support personnel. It is the researcher's experience that often there are judgements made on behalf of the bereaved regarding the viewing of soldiers fatally maimed in combat.

However, judgements made in these circumstances need to be based on the objective of not perpetuating regret and possible poor bereavement outcomes.

Funeral

It would be difficult for most people not to be moved by the images of flag draped caskets being carried by bearers into a funeral for ADF personnel killed in combat to the sounds of the unit march. In the military context this researcher has observed military funerals all of which present as dignified, ceremonial, arranged with military precision and very becoming of the importance which the deceased's unit placed on the recognition of their deceased mate. For the families and NOK of the deceased the military pageantry may symbolise a lot more than the death of a military mate. It is the funeral for a husband, a son, a grandson, a brother or a partner and an extended family member. For SF funerals it may be even more. It may be a ritual which farewells a fallen warrior.

A considerable number of bereavement theorists have validated the importance of funeral rituals (Hoy, 2013; McKissock & McKissock, 1995; Rando, 1993; Shuchter & Zisook, 2006; Worden, 2002) be they private rituals such as those confined to immediate family and friends or organisational rituals which involve the recognition of the status that the deceased had within an organisation (Doka, 2003a) or both.

The evidence suggests that a funeral plays an important role in the facilitation of the grief process through the reinforcement of the certainty of the loss and the facilitation of dialogue and support between mourners (Giblin & Hug, 2006; McKissock & McKissock, 1995; Worden, 2002). Through participation of the social networks in the funeral the bereaved are strengthening their ties to their social support systems (Rando, 1993) and sharing emotional experiences which, whilst reinforcing reality, may give the bereaved further meaning in terms of the nature of the death (Pennebaker, Zech, & Rime, 2004). Funeral rituals may also have an important role in the therapeutic interventions for disenfranchised grief (Hoy, 2013).

When an ADF member dies or is killed in combat the family of the deceased are offered, but not obliged, to have a full military funeral for the deceased member (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013). A full military funeral is highly ritualistic and although sombre in parts, it is ceremonial in character and one which honours the deceased and reinforces the importance of the deceased not only as a member of a family but as having served the nation in the Armed Forces.

For the SF, there is a very high moral obligation in the funeral ritual and this is closely linked to the camaraderie and cultural aspects of a SF unit. This obligation extends post-funeral through continued support by SF units and Trusts and social support notwithstanding may promote positive bereavement outcomes through productive grieving (Giblin & Hug, 2006; Hunter, 2007).

Nonetheless, a SF military funeral is often shrouded in mystery with limited advanced details of the funeral and only a few selected images provided to the media. This security protects the identities of the SF soldiers and Officers engaged in the funeral processes and members from the SF units.

However, in the context of full military funerals be it for SF or non SF there are a lot of unknowns. It is not known what impact this level of privacy and secrecy and limited public portrayal of the funeral has on bereavement outcomes of the SF bereaved NOK. It is not known how the bereaved even perceive a full military funeral in terms of the timing of the funeral and the time allowed for the NOK to make informed decisions. It is also not known if the grieving are allowed to grieve in a manner of their choosing. It is however known that it is important for the bereaved to feel comfortable rather than rushed into having a funeral so that the family do not have regrets about decisions made whilst still in the acute phase of crisis (McKissock & McKissock, 1995).

Social Support

Considerable literature exists on the impact of social support on grieving families (Chapple & Ziebland, 2010; Olssen, 1997; Rando, 1993; Stroebe et al., 2005; Theun, 1997; Vachon & Stylianos, 1988) and the importance of perceptions of social support as being helpful or unhelpful to bereavement outcomes (Breen & O'Connor, 2011; Rando, 1993). The evidence suggests that the type of social support required, (information, emotional or practical support) will be determined by the specific needs of the bereaved (Rando, 1993). For social support to the bereaved to be considered useful there must be a recognition of the type of social support needed and the type of social support that is offered, be it helpful or unhelpful. This has been referred to as a 'goodness of fit' (Vachon & Stylianos, 1988).

However, whilst it is accepted by most researchers that the type of social support has a role in bereavement outcomes there remains a lack of consensus on the extent that such support contributes to eventual outcomes. Some studies indicate that social

support is only productive during the early crisis phase of grief (Olssen, 1997) and then only if it is emotional support. Other studies suggest that social support by professionals can compound grief particularly if it is not sensitive to the cultural, spiritual and familial needs of the bereaved (Rosenblatt, 2006). In contrast, some longitudinal studies have failed to find any significant impact of social support on bereavement recovery (Stroebe et al., 2005).

In terms of traumatic death and social support, a study (Singh & Raphael, 1981) on the bereavement outcomes of relatives of 83 people killed in the 1977 Granville train crash in Sydney NSW identified social support networks as one of the significant factors which influenced better outcomes.

With respect to social support in the military context, a study on the predictors of bereaved parents satisfaction with group support (Geron, Ginzburg, & Solomon, 2003) identified the need for social interactions with others as a motive for joining the group. However the findings are limited by the fact that motivation was measured retrospectively.

In the Leichtentritt et al. (2013) study of girlfriends of fallen Israeli soldiers the authors found that in a society which determines and legally sanctions the next of kin, the girlfriends were excluded from critical aspects of the bereavement support process. This included, formal notification of the death, the need for validation of their bereavement, access to formal support services, financial support and support based on social inclusion. The authors found that qualitative analysis was an appropriate approach to understanding the lived experiences of these participants.

In a military related Israeli context a study (Possick, Shamai, & Sadeh, 2014) on bereaved parents' experiences of support after the death of their child in terror attacks found that a number of criteria determined the parents view of the usefulness of support. These included the degree to which parents were included, the ongoing strong connection with other bereaved families, and the preference for support from Non-Government Organisations that can address the individual aspect of grief and their heritage as Jewish people in the State of Israel.

In context of older retired military veterans, a study on the bereavement experiences of the ex-Veteran's widows (Wilson & Supiano, 2011) found that social support emerged as a predominant theme in assisting with the bereavement process.

Whilst most findings in fact support the positive role of social support, some researchers consider the role to be overstated. Instead credence is given to the view

that social support alone is not the factor, rather, there are personality characteristics which combine to increase chances of a positive outcome (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). This view supports the Neimeyer and Hogan (2004) assertion that bereavement research should advance from a purely quantitative and at times a psychopathological focused approach to a mixed methods approach which can capture the essence of grief.

The Breen (2006) study of the role of family and social networks on bereavement resulting from car crashes emphasised the role that social support networks played in the deterioration of relationships. The author discussed the participants' recall of the lack of acknowledgement of their loss by their social networks, diminishing contact from supports over time, avoidance by others and changes to their support networks. Whilst this study is not focused on combat deaths it nevertheless involves a cause of death which is sudden, violent and unanticipated and could be considered most relevant as earlier discussed.

The aforementioned U.K. Forces Support scoping study into the social support needs of bereaved U.K. military families (Rolls & Chowns, 2011) identified a significant lack of evidence drawn from the experiences of bereaved military families which may identify the challenges of such bereavement and provide guidance to organisations to implement support programs.

A number of studies (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 1999; Rubin, 2006) suggest that for parents, the grief from the loss of a child in any context does not resolve over time and the intensity of grief remains for a longer time than other types of grief (Rando, 1993; Rubin, 2006). Moreover, a sudden, unanticipated and violent death is a common precedent to the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

However, in the military context at least social inclusion through the development of new friendships and networks with other bereaved parents has been identified as an important factor in their search for meaning and release from pain (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 1999). In terms of SF bereaved spouses the practice wisdom and experience of the researcher indicates that the cohort of bereaved spouses obtained significant support and comfort from the military community to which they belong, that is, the SF and this support is sought, offered and accepted. The circumstantial evidence suggested that the social network of bereaved spouses and parents actually strengthened for most families.

This observation should not be surprising given the SF community is a complex, tight knit population with high levels of mutual commitment. It is also not surprising

given the social and cultural characteristics of the military response to a death. However, the degree and type of social support that is articulated by the bereaved as needed and is beneficial to outcomes for bereaved Australian SF families is not yet known.

Disenfranchised grief

The previously mentioned ANAO audit (Auditor-General, 2012 - 2013) on bereavement support to NOK of ADF members raised the possibility that unrecognised partners of deceased ADF members may be denied formal support for their bereavement. This was on the basis that deceased members, for a variety of reasons, may not register his or her partner with Defence prior to death and thus the partners were not listed as a NOK or immediate family member.

The ANAO comment together with the observation that defacto relationships may in fact be recognised by State law regardless of the failure of personnel to obtain a Defence recognition leads to a reasonable assumption that this situation becomes a risk to some bereaved. The non-Defence recognised partners of deceased ADF members may either be, or at risk of, suffering disenfranchised grief.

The original term of disenfranchised grief was introduced by Doka (Kalich & Brabant, 2006; Leichtentritt et al., 2013; Robson & Walter, 2013) to describe grief that is not acknowledged by society either through lack of recognition of the relationship, the loss or the bereaved's grief. Contemporary views of disenfranchised grief acknowledge the types of loss (McKissock & McKissock, 2003; Robson & Walter, 2013) and the lack of recognition of the meanings attached to loss to the point that personal meanings are internalised and the bereaved disenfranchise themselves (Robson & Walter, 2013). Additionally there is a view that due to difficulties that most individuals have encouraging the emotional expression of grief there is an element of disenfranchised grief in all bereavements (McKissock & McKissock, 2003).

Robson and Walter (2013) suggest that with respect to the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved, disenfranchised grief rather than being an all or none or either/or concept is instead a hierarchical or pyramidal concept. Mourners have a place in that hierarchy depending on how their grief is legitimised by societal customs or norms. To be considered disenfranchised it is not that the grief is dismissed or ignored but rather it is that the griever is not at the top of the grieving pyramid as would be the grieving NOK.

In the military context, the Israeli study on the bereavement experiences of 15 girlfriends of Israeli soldiers killed in combat found that disenfranchisement of grief resulted from the cultural concept of kinship which only recognises legally defined relationships and excludes others in terms of acknowledging grief, providing social support and other benefits (Leichtentritt et al., 2013).

There were also some significant lack of military rituals which contributed to the feelings of exclusion from the formal bereavement support including a lack of formal notification and lack of formal military support (Leichtentritt et al., 2013). The girlfriends of the deceased soldiers appeared to experience that which Robson and Walter (2013) considered were expressions of grief above the assigned level on the hierarchy of grief for that culture.

With respect to other nations Harrington-LaMorie (2012) referred to the risk of disenfranchised and complicated grief as a consequence of U.S. Department of Defence formal bereavement support being directed to the primary NOK of deceased U.S. service personnel. Included in the category of those bereaved who have their grief not recognised including ex-spouses, lovers and same sex partners. These few studies on the impacts of combat deaths on bereavement suggest that the ANAO audit has raised an important point at least in terms of ADF military deaths and unrecognised partners or girlfriends of combat troops killed in action.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative research aims to explore and interpret human social experiences in a specific manner in order to strengthen knowledge and understanding of the identified experiences. In this study of bereavement, qualitative research can add to the understanding of the unique and complex issue of bereavement; to the social context of grief and to the development of the theoretical perspectives such as that of meaning making and meaning reconstruction in grief (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2004) by examining the concepts around bereavement from the perspective of the grieving individual.

This study was framed around a qualitative research design which was aimed at exploring the perspectives of participants in terms of their lived bereavement and social support perspectives. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived bereavement experiences and social support perspectives of widows of Australian SF members who were killed in combat whilst serving in Afghanistan. It then expanded to include parents as potential participants. Consequently the purpose was to understand

the lived bereavement experiences and social support perspectives of widows and parents of Australian SF members who were killed in combat whilst serving in Afghanistan. With the lack of recruitment of parent participants the purpose of this study was redefined to determine what can be learned from the problems in recruitment of spouses and parents as participants for this study.

This chapter will encompass the design of this research with a discussion on the qualitative approach to research. This is followed by further discussion on the specific qualitative approach of phenomenology including an overview of transcendental phenomenology which forms the basis of this research method.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because the researcher has identified specific experiences or phenomena for which there is a significant lack of understanding and a significant gap in the literature to guide practice. This phenomena needed further exploration in order to provide practitioners and military Commanders with an evidence base upon which to develop well-founded bereavement support. The inability to measure personal experiences, observations and insights thus makes it unsuitable for quantitative study (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative analysis is considered appropriate to this research as it enables the researcher to engage in in-depth interactions with smaller numbers of participants than quantitative methods (Moustakas, 1994); it allows for comprehensive analysis of complex issues (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004) and, is not constrained by the demand for fact finding and generalisation as required by quantitative methods (Gray 2014). Hence, whilst the cognitive-behavioural responses to a death can be measured through quantitative measures such as grief inventories and scales, the lived bereavement experiences and the perceptions of grief as defined by SF spouses are not measurable (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994) and too complex for a comprehensive analysis (Conklin, 2007).

Neimeyer and Hogan (2004) highlight the importance of diversity in research methodology which includes qualitative research methods in the study of bereavement. The use of methods which can provide a greater understanding of the personal experiences are encouraged by the authors to add depth and greater meaning to the understanding of bereavement.

Numerous qualitative methods exist including the traditional approaches of narrative research, ethnography, symbolic interactionism, grounded theory and phenomenology (Creswell, 2013) and the more contemporary approaches of postmodernism and critical research approaches such as studies based on queer theory and feminist theory (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This study chose a phenomenological approach.

The literature review in this chapter raised a number of questions about the rituals of a military response to the death of a SF member and in doing so it reinforced the need for a qualitative method to understanding the chosen phenomena. To understand what the bereaved may think or feel about receiving the tragic news of the death of loved one cannot be measured. The outcomes can be measurement, for example through the use of grief scales, but it is the narrative which tells the reader how the bereavement was experienced. It tells the researcher the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the bereavement as lived by the bereaved.

Therefore, this study adopted a phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions and reality of bereavement as experienced by the SF spouses and discussed in Chapter 1. In doing so it was attempting to capture the essence of the experiences through the identification of core themes that constitute the phenomena of a SF combat related bereavement.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent to participate is an essential element for research with human participants. For this study participants were to be fully informed of the research purpose, aims, significance and process before the interview and all participants were to be informed of the right to seek information or ask questions before, during and after the interviews. There was to be full disclosure of the research data with the intent that participants could read their own interview transcripts. This research did not involve covert data collection.

To maintain privacy, confidentiality and safety of information all interview notes, letters, documents, digital recordings, consent forms and identifying information was to be securely contained in a locked container. The Nvivo10 software program was installed on a secured laptop with password protection and stored in a locked safe. Participants were to be issued a pseudonym to protect their privacy and the relevant

pseudonyms would have been securely stored. All research information is to be kept for the mandatory time.

To ensure further privacy of the participants, any information revealed in the interviews which could be deemed to be of a private or personal nature would not have formed part of the data analysis. Besides the confidentiality issues to include such material in an analysis has the potential to cause harm to the participant.

In terms of participant safety and the “cause no harm” principle this research was to have ensured that all participants are treated with empathy in a respectful manner in a comfortable interview environment. In the event that a participant showed or indicated signs of distress or possible mental health issues, such as prolonged or complicated grief, the interview was to be ceased and appropriate support offered.

All participants, regardless of levels of distress, would have been offered a follow up session with a community agency such as Veterans and Veteran’s Counselling Service (VVCS) which provides ongoing counselling and support to families of all ADF veterans. Finally, all aspects of this research were subjected to a risk management risk analysis process aimed at identification of risk and elimination or reduction of risk with a formal plan submitted to the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

RESEARCH METHODS

All research is required to be conducted in an ethically sound manner which meets the legislative and policy guidelines of the supervisory body. The ethical policy that guided this research was the Edith Cowan University (ECU) Human Research Ethics Committee Guidelines and the study complied with the standards of the National Statement of Ethical Human Research.

Ethical Approval

An application for ethical approval to conduct a phenomenological study with the bereaved spouses of Australian SF members KIA in Afghanistan was submitted to the ECU Committee. The application included a detailed risk analysis risk management plan in line with the Committees guidelines. A number of clarifications were sought by the Committee and the researcher was advised that all the initial recruitment contacts to potential participants would need to occur through an intermediary recruiting agency and approval was subsequently received to proceed with this study.

In accordance with the two Department of Defence research policies, namely the Human Research in Defence Instructions for Researchers Volume 23 and the Defence Instruction (General) 24-3 The Conduct of Human Research in Defence this research did not require ethical approval from the Australian Defence Human Research Ethics Committee (ADHREC). This was based on the fact that this research did not have any ADF or APS employees as participants, did not use Defence resources and was not conducted on a Defence establishment.

Research Participants

The participants were drawn from a target population of spouses of SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan during the operational years 2001 – 2013. Although SF remained in Afghanistan until 2014 it was considered that the time since death of the member should be over 12 months so as to lessen the risk of distress to the widow.

The spouses were selected on the basis they were the spouses of the SF members of a specific undisclosed SF sub unit at the time of death. All of the deceased must have had their remains repatriated to Australia so as to avoid the impact of ambiguous loss or loss which occurs when a soldier is missing in action (MIA) presumed dead. This sampling is referred to as purposeful criterion based sampling in that the researcher had a specific purpose for the selection of the specific participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) and the potential participants all shared the same phenomena.

Initial facilitation of the recruitment of potential participants was commenced by the Manager of a SF Resources Trust (to be known as “The Trust”) who has had an ongoing positive professional relationship with many widows of deceased SF soldiers. Due to structural reorganisations and strategic re-direction of The Trust the responsibility for facilitation of recruitment was taken over by the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of The Trust. The COO is also known to the researcher and the SF families and was provided with a background to the research together with the Information Letter (Appendix A) and the Consent Form (Appendix C) and an overview of the research. It was a requirement of the ECU Human Research Ethics Approval Committee that the researcher not have a direct role in the initial recruitment. The COO agreed to have the major recruitment role for the researcher and to make the initial contact with potential participants by email.

Participants received a written invitation to participate in the study and from previous employment related discussions with the COO it was anticipated that three widows for this study could be available. The email invitation to potential participants from the COO contained a copy of the Information Letter for participants (Appendix A) and a Consent Form (Appendix B). Contact details of the COO and the chief researcher were given should participants wish to discuss the research.

No time frame was given for a response to the request, however, the researcher waited three weeks before holding further discussions with the COO who confirmed that all potential participants had received the request. It was hoped that an individual response or discussions between the potential participants may have led to a snowball effect and other participants may emerge. Whilst the sampling criteria emphasised a specific sub-unit of the SF bereaved population the researcher was open to extending the criteria should a snowball effect involve widows in other SF units.

Data Collection

The response rate to the recruitment of SF widows was poor with no potential participants responding to the recruitment requests. Discussions with the COO indicated that the SF culture of secrecy and preference to remain hidden from mainstream society may have been an influencing factor in the poor response rate. It was also suggested that personal contact from the researcher in the first instance would have been positively received. The researcher also considered the cultural aspects of SF whereby bereaved families remain a part of the SF community and have a tendency to consult with members on important matters and make significant decisions based on this consultation process. In terms of bereavement it is also possible that bereaved spouses made a decision not to risk possible distress.

Nevertheless, there is a professional and ethical responsibility for researchers to explain the data collection process which would have been undertaken. Data for thematic analysis was to be obtained through face to face, one on one semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher (Appendix D) using a digital recorder with separate Micro SD data card for each participant. Each participant was to be interviewed separately so as to maximise the amount of information obtained and to avoid participant reluctance to disclose information in the presence of other participants.

Interviews were considered an appropriate method for obtaining qualitative information in that participants are not confined to a set task orientated measurement regime. Rather, participants would have been encouraged to articulate their lived experiences as they perceive them. The initial research question for this study was: What do the bereavement experiences of spouses of SF members killed in combat during Operation Slipper look like? The participants were to be interviewed at a location of their choosing which could have included the options of their own homes or in a quiet interview room provided by the SF Trust. Skype was another option available. The participants could have elected to have a companion or support person with them.

Prior to commencement of the interviews, the participants were to be provided with information on the interview processes and pseudonyms for identity protection. Informed consent to the interview was to be obtained and each participant would have been advised that they could indicate a need for a break from the interview at any time. If participants became distressed the interview would have been discontinued and if appropriate participants would be offered a referral to VVCS, a no cost confidential counselling and support service provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Intended Data Analysis

The analytical process for this study was to follow the transcendental analysis steps as defined by Moustakas (1994) which emphasise the essence of the lived experience, the integration of experience and behaviour and the putting aside or bracketing of researcher judgements so the lived experiences are viewed by the researcher as a fresh or new phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). The organisation, management and analysis of data intended to utilise the NVivo10 for Windows qualitative data analysis software in conjunction with the Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis. NVivo10 assists in the coding of data and identifies categories of themes.

The modified van Kaam method as a paradigm has previously been presented in brief in Chapter 1, however, the step by step process of data analysis is explained in greater detail as it would have occurred if data was available.

Moustakas modified van Kaam analysis.

The Moustakas modified van Kaam framework uses the word for word transcript of interview from each participant and after thoroughly reading and re-reading the transcript the researcher seeks clarification from the participant regarding any information which is to be deleted for privacy reasons or clarified. Any reference to the identity of the SF population is omitted as is any operational security information. The analysis then commences with the first of a seven step process (Moustakas, 1994).

Step 1. This step is known as horizontalization which Moustakas (1994) refers to as the identification of the information from the transcript which is of relevance to the phenomena. Every relevant piece of information is listed. This would incorporate expressions such as sentences, phrases, words or emotional responses which were related to bereavement experiences. Horizontalization allows for early trends to be identified.

Step 2. This step involves the reduction and elimination or the removal of information that is not necessary to the understanding of the research phenomena. This includes surplus expressions. If it is not needed to understand the phenomena then it must be eliminated.

Step 3. This involves clustering and thematising of participant information according to the emerging themes of the lived experience. The information from Step Three will be clustered into what becomes the core themes of the data. Examples of themes could be notification, war, repatriation, social support.

Step 4. The invariant constituents and their themes are checked against the complete transcript of each participant to determine if they can be related to the transcript. If the information and themes are not explicitly expressed or is not compatible with the transcript information then it is deleted.

Step 5. The invariant constituents and themes which remain are used to construct what Moustakas (1994, p121) referred to as an “Individual Textural Description”. It is the themes which describe the individuals experience and includes verbatim examples from the participant’s transcript.

Step 6. The perceptions of each research participant regarding their experiences around the phenomena under study are then documented.

Step 7. This is the final step in the modified van Kaam framework and involves the construction of a descriptive transcript which incorporates the themes. Moustakas (1994, p 121) referred to this as a “textural-structural description of meanings”.

The Moustakas modified van Kaam Method of analysis is utilised in conjunction with a software program namely, NVivo10 for Windows qualitative data analysis. This software is a platform developed by QSR International for organising, managing and analysing data. It assists in the identification of pre-determined and emerging themes within the data and was intended to be used in this research.

THE WAY FORWARD

Although this study did not recruit potential widowed spouse participants it is nevertheless important to remain true to the research framework which guided this study. Phenomenological study has at its core a belief that a phenomena must be allowed to speak for itself (Gray 2014). The absence of potential spouse participants is a part of the phenomena and as such forms an important component of the essence of the phenomena.

Whilst this study was examining spousal bereavement the search for the understanding of combat related bereavement experiences however, is not restricted to immediate NOK. Besides the immediate family including parents, grandparents and siblings, the death of a combat soldier also impacts on the immediate mates, the wider unit and the greater ADF community.

In reflecting on the issues surrounding the poor recruitment outcomes the researcher considered that bereaved parents may be interested in sharing their experiences of bereavement related to the death of their sons. At the same time this may shed light on the difficulties in recruitment of spouses or it may also interest spouses as a result of the snowball effect. It was therefore decided to remain true to the study of phenomenology and to attempt to understand the essence of the phenomena as it presented thus far. The study needed to move to another phase in order to achieve this outcome. For this study it is identified as Phase 2 of the study - a study of the lived bereavement experiences and perceptions of social support of parents of SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER 3: PHASE 2: PARENTAL BEREAVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Phase 2 of this study was enacted due to the lack of recruitment of bereaved SF spouses as outlined in Chapter 2. This progression reflects the importance of accommodating the basic principle of a phenomenological paradigm that the world is a social construct and the aim of the researcher is to understand what is happening within that social construct (Gray 2014). Figure 4 depicts the progression in the journey of this study from the Phase 1 phenomenological study of the lived bereavement experiences of SF spouses to Phase 2 and the study of the lived bereavement experiences of SF parents.

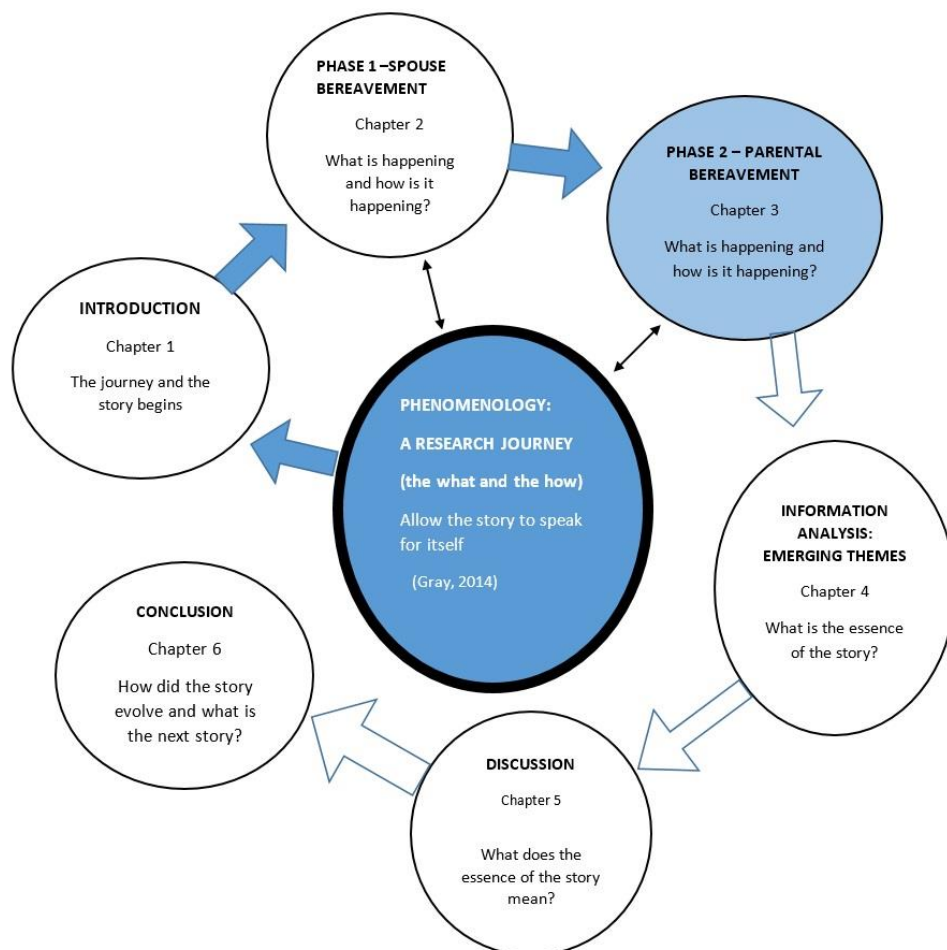


Figure 4. Phase 2: The research journey for SF parental bereavement

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived bereavement experiences including social support of parents of Australian SF members who were killed in combat whilst serving in Afghanistan. It is anticipated that the inclusion of bereaved parents will provide insight into lived combat related bereavement experiences in a SF context.

The impact of combat related deaths on the bereavement outcomes on parents of Defence personnel killed in combat is limited mainly to studies in Israel (Geron et al., 2003; Ginzburg, Geron, & Solomon, 2002; Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 2004) and similar to literature relating to Australian SF widows there is a dearth of information on bereavement outcomes of SF parents. The researcher therefore considered this study would not be compromised by the inclusion of parents of SF members killed in combat.

Phase 2 resulted in two parents making contact to discuss aspects of the study and goals of the research. Additional information was provided to both potential participants and the parents provided informed consent. However, for private and confidential reasons, the participants withdraw from the study prior to the commencement of the interviews. In line with ethical principles and the initial advice to potential participants the decision was respected and not questioned.

Chapter 3 will present the literature review around bereaved parents, extending on the Chapter 2 review this is followed by the purpose of the study, with a discussion on the research design and methods. The chapter concludes with a section on the way forward.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is intended to add to a review of the literature provided in Chapter 2 and as such will consider literature only as it relates to parental bereavement and the loss of soldier child. The researcher considers that many of the factors influencing SF combat related bereavement experiences of spouses remain true for parents. Processes including notification, repatriation, viewing and funerals for example could be expected to have an influence on the parental bereavement experience.

The outcomes of loss experienced by parents when their child dies, including an adult child, has been well documented (Harper, O'Connor, Dickson, & O'Carroll,

2011; McKissock & McKissock, 2003; Rando, 1993; Rubin, 2006; Rubin & Malkinson, 2004; Schupp, 2004; Worden, 2002). The findings outlined by various studies into parental grief have included an inability of parents to experience what the parents described as closure to their loss (Woodgate, 2006); ambivalence of parents regarding their own death; suicidal ideation with the desire to be released from the pain (Harper et al., 2011); ongoing grief (Rubin, 2006) and, depression and physical illnesses (Rogers, Floyd, Seltzer, Greenberg, & Hong, 2008; Woodgate, 2006). Additionally, when an adult child has their own family there can be varying degrees of disenfranchisement of grief for the parents of the adult child (Rando, 1993).

In terms of the overall bereavement experience, the available literature depicts parental bereavement as painful, enduring and intense (Rando, 1993); harrowing, substantial and complex (Woodgate, 2006); persisting along the lifespan continuum (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 1999) and, often riddled with guilt, anger, yearning and pining (Rando, 1993). Nevertheless, there is also evidence of resilience in bereavement and a belief that grief can sometimes enhance relationships between parents (Rando, 1993).

When the deceased child is an adult soldier killed in combat there are additional challenges which may impact on the long term adjustment of the parents. This can include the meanings of war held by the parents, the considerable and complex military rituals (Raphael, Stevens, et al., 2006), the socio-cultural context of the bereavement including the military environment (Beder, 2003), the public as extended family (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 2000) and, the impact of previous deployment separations on the attachments to the deceased (Basham, 2008). The following review will further explicate the findings on the loss of adult soldier children killed in combat.

The loss of an adult aged soldier child

The findings on the impact of war deaths on parents have indicated physical, social and psychological detriments including premature ageing, social isolation and withdrawal, depression and poor self-concept (Harrington LaMorie & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011). For parents who have little or no contact with other grieving parents in similar circumstances there are some distinctive challenges including an inability to normalise the experience through observance of others grieving in similar circumstances (Harrington LaMorie, 2011).

A study on the impact of a war death on parents of soldiers killed in the Yom Kippur War 1973 and the 1982 Lebanon war found significantly greater anxiety in the

bereaved parents compared with non-bereaved as well as a greater incidence of somatic symptoms, psychological distress and social anguish. This was particularly so in those who had reached 4 years post-death. It is not known if the soldiers were SF but it is possible given that Israeli Forces have significant Special Forces Units (Leslau, 2010).

A qualitative pilot study (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 1999) on the ageing of grief in Israeli elderly parents bereaved by the death of their adult child in military service found that the burden of grief is carried throughout the life of the bereaved and becomes heavier with time. Parental bereavement was characterised as timeless, painful and different at least in Israeli society. For the bereaved parents there was no end to their grief and a powerful bond between the parents and the deceased child continued throughout their life. Even though there were times when the parents were not entirely preoccupied with the death this was only a temporary relief and was not indicative of steps toward resolution (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 2000).

A follow up qualitative study of parents also bereaved by the loss of their sons in military service (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 2004) depicted elderly parents as offended by the common but misguided concept of closure and carrying through their life the fear that when they die so does the memory of their deceased son. The authors considered a sample size of 47 to be small, however, for a qualitative study involving the lived experiences of bereaved this could be perceived as more than adequate to reach saturation within a thematic analysis (Creswell 2013).

With respect to U.S. literature, Beder (2003) identified that the meaning of war which bereaved parents hold has the capacity to complicate grief. The perceptions of the nature of the war as just or unjust, the soldier as a fallen warrior and hero or one with unfinished business can strongly predict bereavement outcomes (Beder, 2003). Rando (1993) adds to this with assertions that society also holds symbolic meanings for a death in combat which impact on the adjustment of the bereaved.

Despite the concept of transferability of knowledge the limitation of the Israeli military studies is the inability to generalise from bereavement outcomes in Israeli parents to those of parents of Australian SF. Israeli socio-cultural dimensions in the context of fallen soldiers is characterised by the ongoing honouring of the dead through widespread commemorations, monuments and memorials which connect personal and national mourning into a significant relationship (Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 2000). In Australia, whilst the death of a SF soldier in combat attracts the attention of

the media and the military units have their own memorials, the attention stays in the public domain for a short time. Rightly or wrongly, the ongoing attention appears to be directed more to the Victoria Cross (VC) winners.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived bereavement experiences including perceptions of social support of parents of Australian SF members who were killed in combat whilst serving in Afghanistan on Operation Slipper 2001 – 2014. For Phase 2 of the study the use of purposeful criterion based sampling was selected as it was hoped that a snowball effect may assist to recruit and conduct face to face interviews with parents of the deceased SF members.

The development of an understanding of the lived experiences of the bereaved parents may add to the literature on bereavement support to SF parents whose sons were killed in combat. A practical application of this deeper understanding of the phenomena may be to guide agencies involved in military bereavement support to develop appropriate, evidence based professional practitioner's manuals for social workers providing bereavement support in the SF context. The additional literature may also guide the development of best practice manuals for SF military leaders in the provision of bereavement support of NOK and SF members. The research question for Phase 2 of this study is: What do the lived bereavement experiences and perceptions of social support of parents of Australian SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan look like?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative research aims to explore and interpret human social experiences in a specific manner in order to strengthen knowledge and understanding of the identified experiences. In terms of the study of bereavement, qualitative research can add to the understanding of the unique and complex issue of bereavement; to the social context of grief and to the development of the theoretical perspectives such as that of meaning making and meaning reconstruction in grief (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2004) by examining the concepts around bereavement from the perspective of the individual enduring the grief.

This Phase 2 study as was the case with the Phase 1 study of bereaved spouses was framed around a qualitative research design aimed at exploring the perspectives of participants in terms of their lived bereavement and social support perspectives.

Methodology

The methodology for this phase of the study remains the same as for the study of bereaved spouses outlined in Phase 1. A qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen because of the significant lack of understanding and the gap in the literature regarding the phenomena of the lived experiences of bereaved SF parents. This phenomena needed further exploration in order to provide practitioners and military Commanders with an evidence base upon which to develop well-founded bereavement support.

The inability of Phase 1 of the study to understand the essence of the lived experience in so far as bereaved SF spouses are concerned, should not detract from the phenomenological methodology. As discussed in Chapter 1 and will be further examined in Chapter 5 there are a number of assumptions, beliefs, values and preconceptions which have the potential to influence the recruitment of potential participants. However, phenomenology requires the researcher to put aside or bracket such influences and to understand the phenomena as it is (Patton, 2002). This is known as *epoche* or bracketing researcher's experiences from those of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

As in Phase 1 qualitative analysis is considered appropriate as it enables the researcher to engage in in-depth interactions with smaller numbers of participants than quantitative methods (Moustakas, 1994); it allows for a comprehensive analysis of complex issues (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004) and, is not constrained by the demand for fact finding and generalisation as required by quantitative methods (Gray 2014). The decision to continue with a transcendental phenomenological approach for Phase 2 of this study was based on the advantages of that specific framework. Phenomenology allows for in-depth conversations with participants (Creswell, 2009) and given the previously identified additional challenges with parental bereavement this was considered important. Additionally, transcendental approaches allow for emerging themes to be further explored.

The literature review in Chapter 2 raised a number of questions about the rituals of a military response to the death of a SF member and in doing so it reinforced the need

for a qualitative method to understanding the chosen phenomena. To understand what the bereaved may think or feel about receiving the tragic news of the death of their son cannot be measured. It is the narrative which tells the reader how bereavement was experienced. It tells the researcher the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the bereavement as lived by the bereaved. Therefore, this study intended to adopt a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions and reality of bereavement as experienced by the SF parents.

Ethical Considerations

The same ethical considerations would be given to this phase of the study as was given to potential participants for Phase 1 and detailed in Chapter 2. This included adherence to the principles of privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, the need for full disclosure of data, maintenance of security of transcripts and accompanying documents and the use of pseudonyms. As was the case with Phase 1, all data and research information would be kept for the mandatory time of 5 years minimum.

To ensure further privacy of the participants, any information revealed in the interviews which could be deemed to be of a private or personal nature would not have formed part of the data analysis. Besides the confidentiality issues, to include such material in an analysis has the potential to cause harm to the participant.

In terms of participant safety and the ‘cause no harm’ principle this research would have ensured that all participants were treated with empathy in a respectful manner in a comfortable interview environment. In the event that a participant showed or indicated signs of distress or possible mental health issues such as prolonged or complicated grief the interview was to be ceased. The participants would have been debriefed by the researcher.

All participants regardless of levels of distress would have been offered a follow up session with a community agency such as VVCS which provides ongoing counselling and support to families of all ADF veterans. Finally, all aspects of this research were subjected to a risk management risk analysis process aimed at identification of risk and elimination or reduction of risk with a formal plan submitted to the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee.

RESEARCH METHODS

Although Phase 1 of this study as articulated in Chapter 2 had ethical approval through the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee Guidelines there remained a requirement to obtain new approval for this phase given the change in the specific human participants.

Ethical Approval

An amended application for ethics approval was submitted including an updated risk analysis risk management plan. The application was for the research design and methods with the potential participants being parents rather than spouses.

The researcher was advised that all the initial recruitment contacts to potential participants would need to occur through the COO of the intermediary Trust as had occurred in Phase 2. In discussions the researcher formed the opinion that the positive relationship between the COO and the bereaved parents may result in at least one set of parent participants. Again this was positive in the context of a possible snowball effect.

In accordance with the two Department of Defence research policies, namely the Human Research in Defence Instructions for Researchers Volume 23 and the Defence Instruction (General) 24-3 The Conduct of Human Research in Defence this research did not require ethical approval from the Australian Defence Human Research Ethics Committee (ADHREC). However, the ADHREC was advised of the research and provided with the ethics approval number from ECU as a matter of courtesy.

Research Participants

As was the case with the bereaved spouses in Chapter 2 the potential parent participants were drawn from a target population of SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan utilising purposeful criterion based sampling. The potential participants were selected on the basis they were the parents of the SF members of a specific undisclosed SF sub unit at the time of death. The potential participants were either NOK in that their sons were not in a Defence recognised relationship or they would be secondary NOK in that their sons had a spouse at the time of their death.

Similar again to the previous phase there was no age requirement for potential participants and the length of time since the death of their sons was to be more than 12

months. This decision to have parents who have been bereaved for more than 12 months was only partly based on not wanting to cause harm and a decision to err on the side of caution. This was despite the significant evidence from bereaved participants that whilst interviews may sometimes elicit intense emotions the interviews were considered positive experiences (Cook & Bosley, 1995; Dyregrov, 2004) and helpful (Seamark, Gilbert, Lawrence, & Williams, 2000). This criteria was also based on a requirement for security and to protect the identity of the parents

The details of all SF killed in combat including their names and family details are in the public domain and therefore any information which could lead to identification had to be excluded. This includes the location of the SF units to which the deceased belonged and any sensitive or restricted operational information. As required by purposeful criterion based sampling there was a specific purpose and criterion for the selection of the potential participants and in that they all shared the same experience of combat bereavement (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Data Collection

The initial contact with potential participants was made through the COO of The Trust via an email with the research information pack. This pack included the Potential Participant Information Letter (Appendix B) with researcher contact details and the Participant Informed Consent Form (Appendix C). The potential participants were invited to make contact with the COO or the researcher. This was in accordance with the advice of the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee. The COO confirmed that all potential participants had received the information pack and soon after two parents made contact with the COO to request contact from the researcher. The researcher made contact and the parents sought further clarification on the purpose and significance of the study. The interview process was explained including the right to cease the interview without explanation after which the participants provided informed consent. However, soon after both parents withdrew from the study for private and confidential reasons which as per the research agreement cannot be disclosed.

This study had intended to use a semi-structured interview conducted by the researcher either in person or by Skype depending on the participant's choice. The ability of the researcher to conduct face to face interviews in person with participants was restricted by the scattered geographical location of parents around Australia. With the consent of the participants the interviews were to be recorded using a digital

recorder with separate Micro SD data card for each participant to maintain security and confidentiality.

Interviews were considered an appropriate method for obtaining qualitative information in that participants were not to be confined to a set task orientated measurement regime. Rather, participants would have been encouraged to articulate their lived experiences as they perceive them. The participants could elect to have a companion or support person with them. If participants became distressed the interview would have been discontinued and if appropriate participants would be offered a referral to the VVCS, a no cost confidential counselling and support service provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Intended Data Analysis

The analytical process for this study was to follow the transcendental analysis steps as defined by Moustakas (1994) which emphasise the essence of the lived experience, the integration of experience and behaviour and the putting aside or bracketing of researcher judgements so the lived experiences are viewed by the researcher as a fresh or new phenomena (Moustakas, 1994) .

This modified van Kaam framework uses the transcript of interview from each participant and begins a seven step process. These steps have been explicated in Chapter 2 and would remain the same for this phase of the research apart from the fact that there may be additional themes. It would be anticipated that themes such as parental grief, loss of a child and parent-child bond may amongst themes to emerge from the data.

As was intended with the spousal bereavement study in Phase 2 the NVivo10 software platform was to be used in conjunction with the Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam seven step method of analysis of phenomenological data previously described

THE WAY FORWARD

Phase 2 of this study was able to recruit two parents for semi-structured interviews aimed at understanding the lived experiences of bereaved parents of SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan. However, the parents withdrew from the study and for confidential and ethical reasons the circumstances remain undisclosed.

As was the situation at the end of the SF spouse study depicted in Chapter 2 the researcher returned to the phenomenological paradigm which underpinned this research for guidance on the way forward. This returned the researcher again to Gray's (2014) assertion that a phenomena must be allowed to speak for itself. Relating this to the current study it is therefore imperative that the researcher consider the dynamics that underpin the phenomena under study thus far. In other words what is happening in this study that potential participants were unable to be recruited and how is it happening? As is often the case in phenomenological research, the context is fluid and new phenomena emerge which can take a study in a new direction.

Given that no data was available for this study the following chapter of this study will analyse the information from Chapters 1 to 3 with the purpose of identifying emerging themes which may assist in understanding the essence of this story. Chapter 4 presents the phenomenological information analysis of the Chapters 1 to 3 utilising a modified version of the Moustakas modified van Kaam method.

CHAPTER 4: THEMATIC INFORMATION ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presents the thematic analysis of information from this study with SF spouses and parents bereaved by the death of a SF partner or son killed in combat in Afghanistan. It was anticipated that a phenomenological approach would obtain qualitative data from semi-structured interviews which would generate patterns of information that could be utilised to understand the chosen phenomena.

Figure 5 depicts this chapter of the study and identifies the return to the basis of qualitative research to determine the essence of this story after the unsuccessful recruitment experience. Through the thematic analysis of information, emerging themes give meaning to the question of what is the essence of the story.

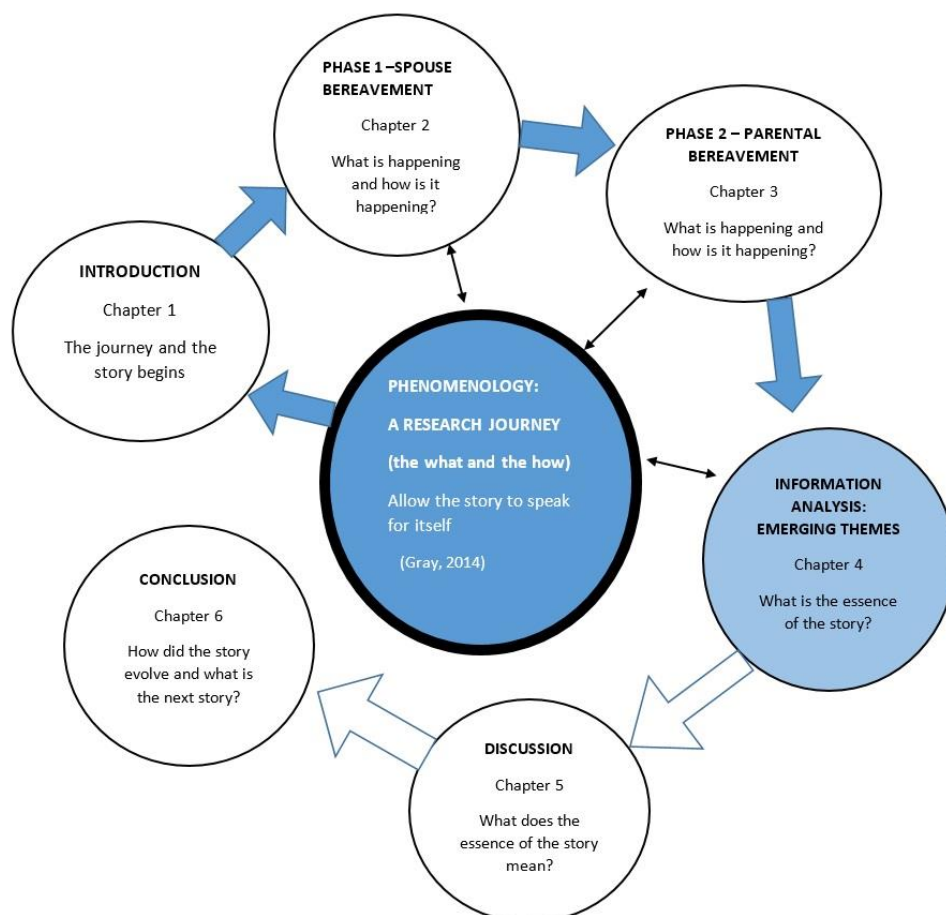


Figure 5. Chapter 4 analysis in the context of the research journey

As presented in Chapters 1 and 2 this phenomenological study was unsuccessful in the recruitment of participants. However as discussed in Chapter 1, the nature of qualitative inquiry allows for additional phenomena to emerge as the study progresses and Patton (2002, p436) observes that insights in a qualitative study can often appear “almost serendipitously”. Such insights in this study occurred through reading and re-reading the information in the preceding chapters. Subsequently a pattern in the information discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 emerged.

This pattern recognition which is essential in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013) generated a new phenomenon in this study, namely the difficulties of a phenomenological study involving lived bereavement experiences in the context of SF combat deaths. What such pattern recognition provided was the opportunity for this study to become a narrative in itself, rich in information which can be used to gain insight into what is happening and how it is happening.

The patterns which were emerging from within the narrative of this study included sampling difficulties, sampling strategies, the military and SF as a unique population, a study with inherent research challenges and, the SF and their families as an enigmatic population. Recognition of these emerging patterns are important and they will be the focus of the thematic analysis undertaken later in this chapter.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a systematic approach whereby a large amount of qualitative information is reduced into significant and meaningful concepts represented as themes. The qualitative information is not restricted to interview material but can include, although not limited to, data or information from sources such as articles, literature, case studies, poems, policy documents, historical documents and photographs (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). To assist in the reduction of data researchers often use a valid software platform to facilitate the coding which in turn manages the themes for each individual interview transcripts. This study intended to use the NVivo10 software because of its suitability with interview data. However, this study provided information rather than data and given there is no absolute necessity to use software (Patton, 2002) this study will manually organise and manage the information through the application of the systematic Moustakas modified van Kaam model of analysis as depicted in Figure 6 (Moustakas 1994).

Figure 6 depicts how the information from this study was reduced from three chapters of information to clusters of information based on explicitly expressed information relevant to the fundamental question of phenomenology, namely, what is happening in this study and how is it happening? From clusters, the themes which can meaningfully describe the experience of this study are formed and narrated. The steps of the Moustakas modified van Kaam model of analysis for this study will be detailed.

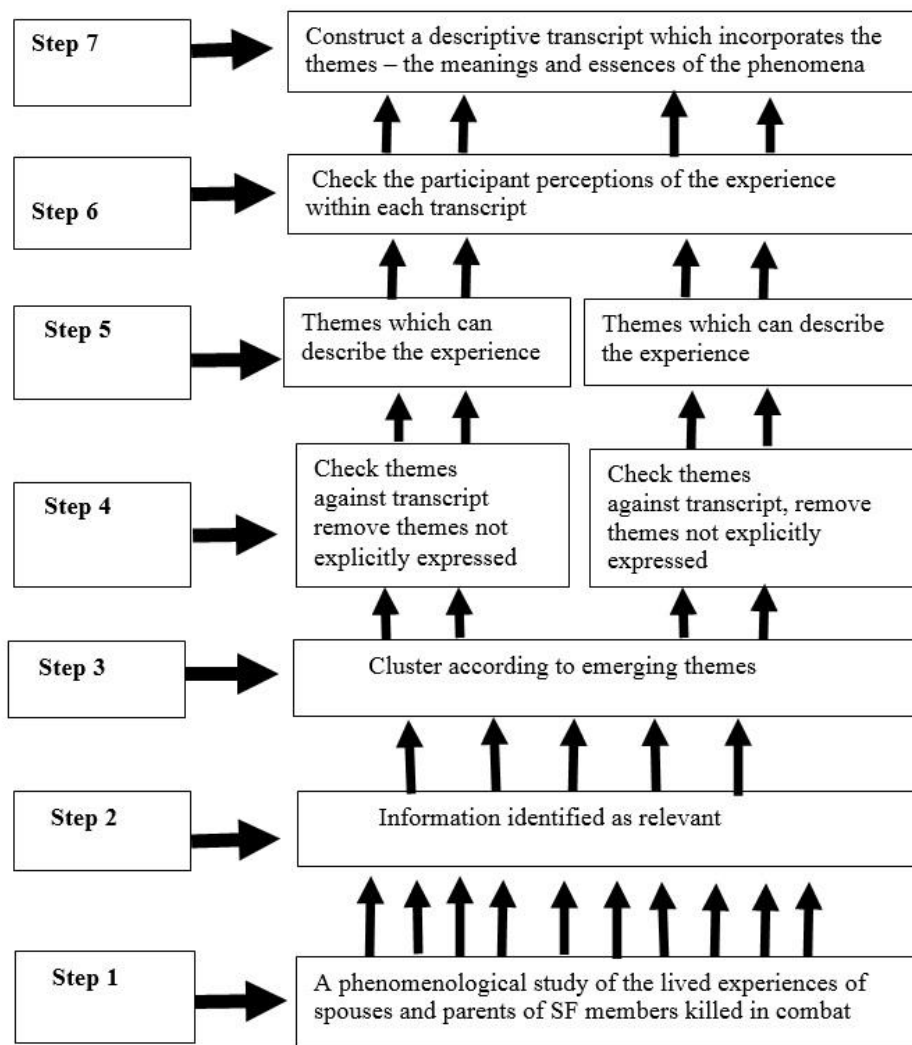


Figure 6. Moustakas modified van Kaam model of thematic analysis

Step 1: Identification of the information which is of relevance to the phenomena (horizontalization).

This stage of analysis required the researcher to read and re-read chapters 1 to 3 of this study and highlight every piece of information relevant to both the original and new phenomena. That is, any information relevant to understanding the lived bereavement experiences of spouses and parents of SF members KIA (original) and any information relevant to understanding what happened in the study and how it happened (new). This allowed for early trends to be identified and for the researcher to obtain a general impression of what has been presented.

By including the original phenomena there is a richness of information available which is important in sustaining research rigour and, if not relevant as the analysis progresses, can be eliminated. A few examples of information that was highlighted for the original phenomena included literature presented on bereavement, traumatic loss, combat death, viewing, funerals, disenfranchised grief and SF. It was considered that from the literature available on the experience of bereavement related to sudden, and violent combat death it would be reasonable to consider there could be an impact on the bereaved's perceptions of the journey through grief. The information considered relevant to the new phenomena included paragraphs around sampling, ethics, military, grief and the culture of SF.

Step 2. Reduction and elimination or the removal of information that is not necessary to the understanding of the research phenomena.

This stage also includes the elimination of surplus expressions. If information is not needed to understand the phenomena then it must be eliminated. In making the determination of whether information is necessary there are two essential criteria which Moustakas (1994) outlined;

- a. Is the information necessary to understand the phenomena?
- b. Can it be abstracted and labelled?

For this study there was considerable information which was considered necessary to understand the phenomena but which could not be abstracted and labelled. It is credible that the notification process, the repatriation of the deceased and the funeral could have an impact on the bereaved to the extent they considered this study to be further distress and therefore declined to engage in the recruitment. In this scenario the

impact cannot be known or labelled without confirmation by the bereaved and therefore references to such concepts were eliminated.

Information which was not necessary to the understanding of the phenomena included the structure of thesis, the significance of the study and, the significance to military Commanders. These sections were also eliminated and the information which remains is termed the invariant constituents of the phenomena. It will be used in Step 3 to be clustered according to similar labels.

Step 3: The clustering and thematising of participant information according to the emerging themes of the lived experience.

This involved re-reading the Chapters 1 to 3 and making notations against particular information that could be categorised. A considerable number of sentences were categorised as military related and others as a sampling problems. These were coded through an allotted colour coding strategy developed by the researcher. A code was considered to be a unit of information such as a word, a phrase, a sentence or a paragraph which could be related to the defined phenomena. To ensure consistency in the notations a journal documenting the defined concepts and colour codes was kept. Any information which did not meet the required definition was eliminated.

Some clusters were further eliminated on the basis that, after re-reading the information, it was apparent it was not needed to understand the phenomena and could not easily be thematised. Examples of clusters eliminated in this manner were the war and death cluster and the support cluster. War and death was a description of the essence of the original phenomena of the lived experience but did not emerge as a theme for understanding the essence of the new phenomena. For the support cluster it could not be labelled as there was no interview data to indicate its definitive role.

The clusters were subsequently apportioned to specific themes. After re-reading and checking against the narrative of this study an overlap of themes was identified and a number of sub-themes or refined categories of similar information (Creswell, 2013) were created to ensure all relevant information was captured in a meaningful manner. These themes and sub-themes would later become the core themes which tell the story of this study and will be discussed in Chapter 6 if not further eliminated. The final process in Step 3 which adds to the credibility of the study is for the constituents, clusters and emerging themes to be clearly identified.

Table 1 depicts the emerging themes, sub-themes, clusters and the constituents with the highlighted concepts being those which were eliminated in the refinement of themes. This elimination reflected the need to keep only explicit information that could be abstracted and labelled.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes with related clusters and dominant constituents*

THEME	SUB-THEME	CLUSTERS	DOMINANT CONSTITUENTS
Theme 1 SF and families as a hard to reach population	The military socio-cultural context	1.Special Forces 2. Military 3. Invisibility 4. Families	culture, combat death, hard to find, SF culture , units, rituals, shared family characteristics , hierarchy, military support, publically invisible, mateship, SF in war media roles, notification, repatriation, support, ethnicity, funerals
Nil theme		1.War and 2.Death	violent , sudden , gruesome, combat,
Theme 2 Bereavement research challenges	Military bereavement research challenges	1.Grief 2.Bereavement 3.Vulnerability 4.Military	SF, military, disenfranchised, viewing, vulnerable , public grief, pain of grief, ethics, distress, bereavement support,
Theme 3 Research methods and research design	Methodology and Sampling	1.Sampling Strategy 2.Literature	Absence of participants and interviews, sampling, design, phenomenology, lack of literature , evidence base, consent, data collection, privacy, ethics Quantitative/ Qualitative, assumptions
Nil theme		1.Support	Type of support, social, military support, SF support, practical, informational
Theme 4 Ethics review processes		1.Bereavement knowledge 2.Process 3.Approvals	Approval process, restrictions, impact on study, knowledge, vulnerable population, sensitivities, initial contact with participants, intermediary, formal approach

*highlighted terms are those eliminated after further analysis.

Step 4: The invariant characteristics and their themes are checked against the complete transcripts.

If the characteristics and themes are not explicitly expressed or are not compatible with the transcript information then it is deleted. The questions that were considered were:

1. Are the invariant constituents and themes explicitly expressed in the document?
2. Are the invariant constituents and themes compatible?

For this analysis the characteristics of emerging themes were checked against all of the remaining information. During this process a number of characteristics and clusters were eliminated due to incompatibility or for not being explicitly expressed. For example, whilst war was implicit in the term combat death it nevertheless was not a concept which was explicitly discussed and therefore not needed.

Step 5. The invariant constituents and themes which remain are used to construct what Moustakas (1994, p121) referred to as an “Individual Textural Description”.

It is the themes which describe the individual's experience and includes verbatim examples from the participant's transcript. There were no participants from which the invariant constituents could be checked. Hence, the themes and constituents were re-checked against the narrative of Chapters 1 to 3. For this study the emergent themes were the SF and families as a hard to reach population, research methods, ethical review processes and bereavement research challenges. These themes were then constructed as a single document with accompanying examples. Chapter 5 of this study provides further discussion.

Step 6. The perceptions of each research participant regarding their experiences around the phenomena under study are then documented.

For this step the core themes extracted during this process are described. The core themes for this analysis are:

1. Theme 1: SF and families as a hard to reach population
2. Theme 2: Bereavement research challenges
3. Theme 3: Research methods and research design
4. Theme 4: Ethics review process

Step Seven: A descriptive transcript which incorporates the themes is constructed.

This is the final step in the Moustakas modified van Kaam framework and involves the construction of a descriptive transcript which incorporates the themes. Moustakas (1994, p121) referred to this as a “textural-structural description of meanings”. In the context of this study the step involves the narration of the identified themes to express the analysis. The presentation and the analysis of the information provided in Chapters 1 to 3 identified five dominant themes and a more comprehensive discussion of the themes will be presented in Chapter 5.

Table 1 illustrates the themes which emerged from an analysis of the information of this study. These themes assist in the understanding of the phenomena of the experience of a phenomenological study which was challenged by a lack of potential participants.

Theme 1: SF and families as a hard to reach population

A number of instances were noted throughout the study that identified characteristics of SF which were considered congruent with a hard to reach population. These included the description of SF as unique sub-cultures that function within protected and secure environments and non-traditional, unconventional military members who remain mysterious, enigmatic and so secretive as to be publically invisible. Characteristics of SF families also included an element of secrecy, invisibility and descriptions of non-traditional military families. These descriptions would suggest that SF are not visible to the community and due to protected identity most of the community would not know them.

Theme 2: Bereavement research challenges

This study was challenged by significant factors which impacted on the ability of the study to obtain potential participants. All of the relative constituents grouped around four clusters which contributed to the emergence of this theme which depicted a vulnerable and grieving population in a SF military context whose participation in this study may have been influenced by the ethical challenges.

Throughout the study reference is made to a range of emotional and psychological factors as the pain and distress of grief which certainly depict the bereaved as a vulnerable population in the context of research.

Theme 3: Research methods and research design

A considerable amount of information within this study contributed to the identification of the invariant constituents which led to the emergence of this theme. The research methods within this study only applied to the phenomena of the lived bereavement experiences (the original research question) and thus the theme, clusters and constituents are related to the original phenomena.

The types of information which were prominent included sampling strategies, participant selection, data collection strategies and research assumptions. The methodology used in the study of grief and bereavement has an important influence on the ability of the researcher to obtain meaningful information and this was evidenced by the dominant discourse relating to research design which was centred on the choice of a qualitative methodology with invariant constituents including phenomenology and the Quant/Qual divide. For research methods, this theme mirrors the constituents which were extracted from a dominant discourse in the study including data collection methods, ethical approval and the sampling choices.

Theme 4: Ethics review processes

A number of clusters depicted the invariant constituents of this theme including the lack of knowledge of ethical reviewers around qualitative bereavement research and its impact on the wellbeing of the bereaved. The dominant discourse in the information extracted from the study was the role of the ethical review and approval process on the ability of this study to recruit potential participants. Constituents which contributed to the clusters and theme included the approval process and the data collection process in terms of ethical restrictions in qualitative research.

RIGOUR IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In qualitative research the concept of research rigor is often referred to as the trustworthiness of the research and essentially if research is rigorous in quality then it is more trustworthy in terms of findings. Whilst quantitative research refers to validity and reliability in assessing the credibility of research, the most common concepts used in qualitative research for assessing trustworthiness are those offered by Guba and Lincoln (1998). The authors propose the terms credibility, dependability,

confirmability and transferability as the preferred concepts for the assessment of qualitative research.

Credibility

In qualitative research credibility of the findings is a crucial element of research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The research should make sense to all involved, including participants and readers, and there should be a logical connection between the research method, the research questions, the research design and the communication of ideas within the structure of the study (Mays & Pope, 1995). The chosen sample, the data collection method and the method of analysis should all make sense to the researcher, the participants and the readers (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

To enhance credibility, this study used purposeful sampling such that the potential participants were appropriate to the research questions. Only those spouses and parents who had actually experienced the loss of their partner or son were selected. The use of a phenomenological framework was appropriate to understanding of the lived experience and the guidance of an experienced qualitative principal and associate supervisor ensured that the research design and methods were appropriate for the study topic and research questions. The model for data analysis, the Moustakas modified van Kaam model, was chosen for its validity and reliability and its appropriateness for the analysis of qualitative data and information.

Dependability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1998), dependability in qualitative research occurs when the findings of a study are consistent with the data collection methods and if methods change within the research then appropriate procedures adapt to the changing research environment. It is similar to the concept of reliability in quantitative research in that the results should be replicated by other researchers using the same methodology and research design. It is an indicator of the quality of the study and is enhanced through the use of the appropriate data collection, data analysis and communication of findings.

For this study there was a change in the phenomena under study however the new phenomena remained true to use of the methodology given the study progressed to an aim of understanding the experience of research without successful recruitment.

Although the data collection method changed from a data analysis to an information analysis, this change was articulated in a manner that the study could be replicated particularly given the considerable bereavement research challenges.

Confirmability

In quantitative research confirmability is analogous to the concept of objectivity in that the findings of a study have been arrived at through the use and disclosure of appropriate research methodology. For a qualitative study to be considered objective requires the researcher to account for any researcher bias which may explain findings. This could include bias in the thematic analysis in which researchers perceptions of clusters and themes may be grounded in and influenced by personal bias.

Strategies for reducing researcher bias include increasing the transparency of the research process through the use of independent audits and peer reviews and presentation of tables and figures which clearly identify the research methodology including the data analysis process.

For this study the thematic information analysis was outlined in a table format with the relationships between invariant constituents, clusters and emerging themes being clearly identified. A description of the clusters and emerging themes was provided in order to confirm the accuracy of information. The primary problem in maintaining rigour in the data analysis of this study was the ability to minimise researcher bias. In all research the progress of research is influenced by the experiences and positioning of the researcher in the study (Johnston, 2014) and thus for this study, the researcher maintained a journal to account for personal perceptions and experiences. The journey of the researcher was also articulated to provide transparency of the researcher unique perspective in the context of SF related bereavement.

Transferability

Transferability is defined as the ability of findings from one particular research study to be transferred to another context (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). It is important that other researchers be able to clearly identify any lessons from one study that could assist in future research in the same context. To enhance the transferability of a study the researcher should provide thick descriptions of the research context and research methods particularly participants and research design. This enables other researchers to decide if the findings can indeed be transferred (Guba & Lincoln, 1998).

Purposeful sampling as chosen for this study also assists in transferability thus a full and focused account of potential participants was provided in so much as was possible within the context of SF and associated protected identity. However, this research was a study into a relative unknown and highly specialised population and as such was not expecting that any findings could be transferable to studies other than those examining SF and families in the context of combat related death and bereavement.

THE WAY FORWARD

This chapter presented the thematic analysis of information which was reduced from the first three chapters of this study. The progression of the study from the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of spouses and parents bereaved by SF deaths in combat was the consequence of the unsuccessful recruitment of potential participants. Subsequently, the study continued on a journey of discovery of the essential characteristics of the phenomena which emerged in the form of challenges and difficulties in phenomenological studies of hard to reach populations.

The essence of the lived experience of researching a phenomena with a hard to reach population was explored utilising the Moustakas modified van Kamm method of data analysis. This process identified four important themes which can provide an understanding of the “what” and the “how” of phenomenology in the SF bereavement context. Whilst a challenge for phenomenological research is to consider that the research methodology may actually produce results of little importance this phase of the study discovered important concepts which will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 is a synthesis of the thematic information analysis from Chapter 4 of this study. This chapter includes interpretations of the thematic information through the use of available literature which can add to the understanding of the phenomena and the research questions of this study. Figure 7 represents the journey of discovery in this research and depicts Chapter 5 as the discussion on the essence of the story of this study.

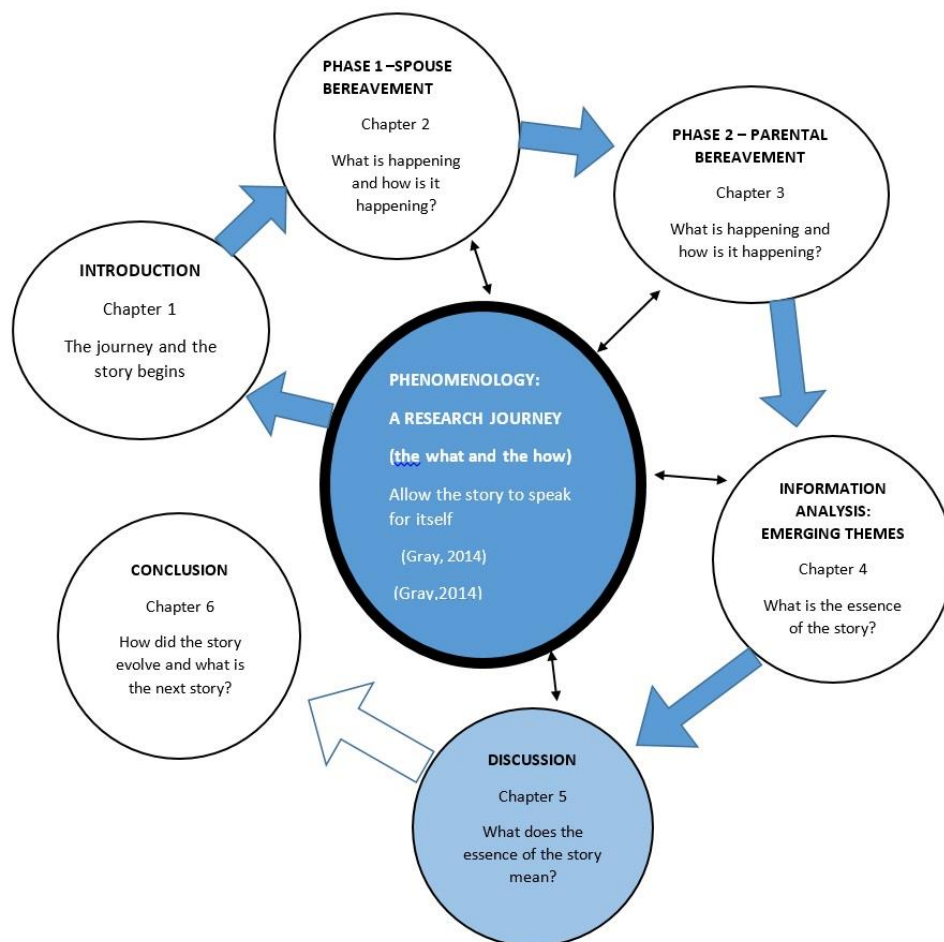


Figure 7. Chapter 5 discussion of the study challenges

Discussions on each of the extracted themes in Chapter 4, namely the SF as a hard to reach population, bereavement challenges, research methods and design and the ethics review process. Included are the three derived sub-themes which encompass the

military socio-cultural context, the military bereavement research challenges and methodology and sampling. The thematic discussion will be followed by a discussion on strategies for enhancing recruitment and conclude with a return to the researchers assumptions and a statement on the way forward.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived bereavement experiences including perceptions of social support of widows of Australian SF members who were killed in combat whilst serving in Afghanistan on Operation Slipper 2001 – 2014. This purpose arose from the gap in literature depicting the lived experiences of bereaved SF families which could provide guidance on bereavement support in the SF context. It was anticipated that further understanding of the lived bereavement experiences would add to the literature and assist professionals align research and practice in bereavement support to military NOK.

Through the use of purposeful sampling it was hoped to conduct face to face semi-structured interviews and engage in a thematic data analysis utilising the Moustakas modified van Kaam model of analysis. With the unsuccessful recruitment of bereaved spouses as potential participants the study progressed to Phase 2 as outlined in Chapter 3. With the withdrawal of the parent participants the sampling challenges encouraged the researcher to further explore the essence of phenomenology to consider the way forward. To achieve this the researcher returned to the literature and the principles of phenomenology which stress the continual process of finding meanings in the story and making sense of human experiences.

Phenomenology generates information and stories from which central themes can be elicited to explain the research questions. This study experienced challenges to the understanding of the specific phenomenon. However, by remaining true to the phenomenological paradigm and by continually reflecting on the literature and the story thus far, the study progressed to provide rich information that allowed the story of the journey in research to speak for itself. This discussion is in the context of a phenomenological research story as depicted in Figure 1 of Chapter 1.

The essence or the fundamental characteristics of the phenomena became a story which was allowed to speak for itself. A deeper understanding of the story of this study is obtained through the following themes which were extracted as the essence of the phenomena. For the purpose of clarity and transparency there will be repetition in the discussion of the themes.

THEMES

Introduction

Four themes emerged from the thematic information analysis of Chapters 1 to 3 and Table 2, as illustrated in Chapter 4 depicts the themes and sub-themes with the clusters and constituents from which the themes emerged.

All of the themes in the analysis of Chapter, were grounded in the narrative rather than the traditional data from interviews. Nonetheless, the themes were considered relevant to the questions of the research and captured important information which could assist in developing an understanding of the phenomena embedded within this journey of research.

In terms of the level at which the themes are extracted most qualitative research focuses on either semantic themes which are explicit surface themes identified according to meanings or latent themes which extend further than the semantic to examine underlying ideologies and theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This study will examine semantic themes with ongoing referral to the relevant literature to assist in the development of comprehensive meanings and insights into possible answers to the research questions. The research questions relevant to this synthesis are;

1. What has happened in this study that explains the unsuccessful recruitment?
2. How is it happening?

The following themes and the literature tell the story of the challenges inherent in this study.

Theme 1: SF and families as hard to reach populations

This theme emerged throughout the study and was connected to the original research questions on the lived experiences of the bereaved spouses and parents of SF members killed in combat and to the subsequent questions of what is happening in this study and how is it happening. The invariant constituents which clustered to typify SF and their families as a hard to reach population included SF culture and ethnicity, invisibility and family characteristics. The theme of SF and their families as a hard to reach population was apportioned a sub-theme, namely the *military socio-cultural context*. To determine what this theme and its sub-theme meant required consideration of the concepts of a hard to reach population which may have impacted on this study.

This would determine if the unsuccessful recruitment in this study was related to the SF and their families comprising a hard to reach population.

A population is considered to be hard to reach if it is not part of mainstream research either because it is not freely available and thus not easily accessed; is elusive; has lowered visibility or, does not have access to traditional data collection methods which would allow connection with researchers (Abrams, 2010). Hence a hard to reach population is one that is hidden and hard to identify or, if identifiable, it is hard to make connections. Faugier and Sargeant (1997) report the tendency of hard to reach populations to hide even more when the focus of research is a highly sensitive subject and/or there are possible legal or societal ramifications for being a participant. In relating these descriptions to SF and their families these characteristics are quite pertinent and reinforce Theme 1 as a significant unit of meaning in understanding the inherent challenges of this study.

In an official history of the SASR, one of the better known SF units (Horner, 2009), the unit operations and personnel are described as being so secretive as to be publically invisible. When in public both SF and their families avoid providing any information on themselves in terms of SF and in fact will deny being part of SF (Horner, 2009; Thomlinson, 2013).

Similarly, Benoit (2005) suggests that hidden or hard to reach populations share three main characteristics which need to be considered when recruiting for potential participants. First, members of the groups intentionally avoid being detected and revealing their identity, second the groups do not acknowledge membership of their group and/or refuse to participate as it may make them the object of derision, and third, the group size is usually unknown.

It is in the public domain that the Commandos are based at Holsworthy New South Wales and the SASR are based at Campbell Barracks Swanbourne Western Australia. However, it is not public knowledge on how many personnel are attached to the units, where they and their families live and when and where they train and deploy. SF and their families are mysterious and make a concerted effort to avoid detection, they remain anonymous with protected identity and an air of secrecy surrounds their lives (Horner, 2009; McPhedran, 2007; Thomlinson, 2013). Furthermore, the “need to know” security principle strongly applies to SF and their families. It basically means that if you need to know something you will be told, if it is decided by SF you do not

need to know then you will not be told. (Fennell, 2009a, 2009b; Macklin, 2014; McPhedran, 2007; Thomlinson, 2013).

Finally, the practice of SF families considering themselves bound by the same societal and cultural mores of the SF suggests that the SF cultural sanctions that were in place when their husbands or sons were alive remained after their death. This is credible given the propensity for SF to continue to maintain strong bonds with and look after families after the death of a member (Thomlinson, 2013).

Sub-theme: The military socio-cultural context

This sub-theme whilst closely aligned with Theme 1, emerged from some distinct constituents including mateship, rituals ethnicity, military, Command and shared family characteristics (Daley, 1999; Frye, 2012; Hughes, 2013; Macklin, 2014). It raised the notion that the social and cultural aspects of SF life influenced the recruitment of potential participants for this study. Whilst acknowledging the individual characteristics of grief and the understanding that all grief is not the same, grief nonetheless occurs in a world shaped by social and cultural factors. The literature indicates that in the military environment the socio-cultural contexts can greatly influence the recruitment of families, particularly the judgements by the military hierarchy on the vulnerability of the bereaved (Frye, 2012).

In general terms most military forces share certain characteristics (Daley, 1999; Hughes, 2013) including rituals, ranks, common language and an ethos of mateship, loyalty, courage and sacrifice. There is a strong element of isolation from society and for the Army there is engagement in legitimised violence and a willingness to kill which most SF families support (Hughes, 2013). All of this occurs in a hierarchical system known as the Chain of Command. Even a military death occurs within a Chain of Command albeit a respectful, dutiful and dignified chain.

The SF form a sub culture of a military organisation and the world of the Australian SF members and their families is a world unknown to most others. It is quite common for SF families to be defined by their loyalty to the culture of the SF and to steadfastly support the role of SF and demand respect to the point researchers have identified military families as possessing the same ethnic identity as their military members. Thus, apart from the military specific roles the same characteristics of SF can be ascribed to the families of SF members (Daley, 1999; Frye, 2012; Horner, 2009; Macklin, 2014; McPhedran, 2007). Those who have written of their service in

the SASR describe a culture of strong and powerful emotional bonds which are also attributed to most families of the SF (Macklin, 2014; Thomlinson, 2013) and which keep the relationship between the SF community and other military and external civilian communities to a minimum. With respect to overall military community connections there is evidence that non-SF military communities do make connections with civilian communities at least in the U.S. military context (Bowen, Martin, Mancini, & Nelson, 2001). Nevertheless, there is no available evidence to suggest that SF and their families openly connect with other communities in a manner which would counteract the difficulties of research with hard to reach populations.

Overall, as a research population the SF and their families, whilst known to exist, could be described as a small, hidden, secretive, inaccessible marginalised group who fulfil the criteria of a hard to sample population. These characteristics impact on the willingness of families to participate in research, particularly bereavement research, and therefore contribute to an explanation for the research question of what happened in this study and how it happened. In terms of what happened, the emphasis is on the unsuccessful recruitment of potential participants from an unrecognised extremely hard to reach population. In terms of how it was happening will be discussed in the remaining themes.

Theme 2: Bereavement research challenges

This theme and the sub-theme of *military bereavement challenges* were connected through the invariant constituents which emphasised the vulnerability, pain and distress of combat related bereavement inherent in the research questions of this study. This theme relates not only to the recruitment challenges but also to the attrition or loss of the potential parent participants. Similarly this theme is reflected in the view of some bereavement researchers (Stroebe et al., 2004) that poor or low response rates in recruitment of potential participants is a common problem in bereavement research. Pain, distress and vulnerability add meaning to the complexities of bereavement research in terms of the individual characteristics of grief, the differing views on the appropriate time after death to recruit participants and the issue of informed consent.

The existence of a counter-argument which defines grief as a socially mediated event is acknowledged but will not be discussed here. With respect to the individuality of grief, a number of axioms around the heterogeneous nature of grief, loss and bereavement have been well documented. most grief, loss and bereavement

professionals stress that grief is an individual experience (McKissock & McKissock, 1995; Stroebe, Hansson, & Stroebe, 2006; Worden, 2002; Wortman et al., 2006) which can widely differ in type and intensity according to the cause and nature of death, the suddenness of the death; whether trauma is involved (Stroebe & Schut, 2004b); the relationship with the deceased and the personal history of loss and bereavement amongst other factors (Centre for the Advancement of Health, 2004; McKissock & McKissock, 2003).

Although there was no available literature on the challenges of SF bereavement studies, all of these concepts indicate that there may be significant and complex differences in the bereavement status of each potential participant within the SF population. Further, these individual differences could contribute to the decision of any one potential participant not to respond to this research recruitment.

With respect to the timing of this study in relationship to the time since the combat death there are differing views on the least intrusive time to recruit potential participants from the bereaved population. Parkes (1995) warns on the potential of psychological harm being caused to the newly bereaved by involvement in research. This is confirmed by a quantitative study (Beck & Konnert, 2007) which examined the opinions and attitudes of 316 bereaved individuals toward research participation. Almost 50% of participants believed that soon after the death they would be unable to consent to bereavement research participation. The majority (51.6%) however, also considered that 1 to 12 months after their loss would be an appropriate time for recruitment.

For this study, the time since the death of the SF members in Afghanistan ranged from 18 months to 12 years (Norton, 2013a) and it cannot be considered with certainty that the potential participants were not experiencing distress to the extent that should exclude them from this study. However, the time since their loss is in line with other qualitative and mixed methods studies involving traumatic death (Breen, 2006; Frye, 2012; Mowll, 2011).

In terms of informed consent Cook (2004) raises the issue of the ability of traumatised persons to provide informed consent. Cook (2004) questions whether or not potential participants can ever be fully cognisant of possible reactions to research particularly in qualitative interviews. Raphael (2001) also questions the capacity of potential participants to provide informed consent given the potential levels of distress which may not be evident to the researchers.

By extrapolating this to a sudden and violent death, such as combat deaths, the challenge to recruitment becomes a question of whether or not NOK are too traumatised to provide informed consent (Dyregrov, 2004). When considering the possible bereavement outcomes such as PTSD and MDD arising as a result of traumatic combat deaths (Rando, 1993) it may also be that traumatised persons are unable to participate and thus make a mindful decision not to participate.

With respect to vulnerable populations and attrition, McFarlane (2007) found that greater retention rates (89% to 100%) occurred when researchers made concerted efforts to establish positive rapport with agencies and constant contact was made with the participants. The importance of developing rapport between the researchers and participants has also been cited as a contributing factor to the retention of participants in bereavement studies (David, Alati, Ware, & Kinner, 2013). Further discussion on vulnerability is provided in *Theme 4: The Ethics Review Process* which reflects the significant influencing factors attributed to ethic reviewers.

Sub-theme: Military bereavement research challenges

The second sub-theme of this study represented the constituents of military, SF, and public grief within the clusters of grief and bereavement. This suggested that bereavement research faces challenges when it is conducted in the military context.

The literature identifies a number of comprehensive qualitative and phenomenological military related bereavement studies which were conspicuous by the fact they were all successful in recruiting participants to military bereavement research. In studies involving the death of IDF members there was limited, or an absence of, recruitment and retention challenges (Abbott, 2009; Leichtentritt et al., 2013; Leichtentritt & Pedatsur-Sukenik, 2012; Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 1999, 2004). The qualitative studies used purposeful criteria based sampling, semi-structured interviews and recruited through external agencies including support agencies and a snowball technique. The authors retained all participants and did not report any specific challenges in the recruitment.

Likewise, in a less recent qualitative study which focused on parental bereavement and the ageing of grief, Malkinson and Bar-Tur (1999) were successful in the recruitment of bereaved parents through an intermediary setting up a support group for older parents of soldiers killed in combat. To form the group and organise a focus group for the study the researchers used personal contacts.

Similar research approaches have been used in U.S. studies of combat related bereavement. Two recent qualitative studies discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 (Frye, 2012; Jennings, 2013) on widows of U.S soldiers KIA, were able to recruit potential participants through a variety of strategies. Frye (2012) recruited 5 widows to a phenomenological study on shared bereavement experiences and described challenges with recruiting methods including the hesitancy of the military hierarchy to assist in recruitment because of the belief the potential participants were vulnerable. Frye (2012) also had failed attempts at recruitment through newspapers and websites but had success with snowball sampling and liaison with outreach support agencies and chaplains on military bases.

Jennings (2013) obtained potential participants through an existing online support service for bereaved spouses of U.S. troops killed in combat. The online service provides an option for bereaved spouses to articulate their lived bereavement experiences and hence the service assisted as an intermediary in obtaining potential participants. Jennings (2013) successfully recruited 15 young participants who gave permission for the researcher to read the narratives of their lived experiences of bereavement. Jennings (2013) considered the sampling strategy of using online websites to be the preferred method as it was identified as being the least intrusive to a vulnerable population (Jennings, 2013).

This sub-theme captures the characteristics of other military studies which may assist in explaining the “what” and “how” questions of this study. The Israeli and U.S. studies used qualitative research approaches as did this study, however, there was no indication that any of the cited studies involved SF families which are now known to be a hard to reach population.

Theme 3: Research methods and research design

This theme reflects the methodology of this study and the challenges to the recruitment of potential participants. The identified clusters were the sampling strategies and the gap in literature related to the research questions of the lived experiences of those bereaved by a SF combat death.

Theme 3 will be divided into two sections namely design and methods so as to recognise the importance of research methods and research design as two distinctly important components of research.

Research Design

The thematic analysis of this study triggered a number of constituents which formed the dominant discourse including the words quantitative, qualitative, design and phenomenology. This suggested that the search for meanings and sense in the phenomena should begin to examine the chosen methodology.

Grief and bereavement research has traditionally involved quantitative research designs which have involved experimental methods such as surveys and the measurement of traits such as normal grief and traumatic or complicated grief. Specialised scales such as the Inventory of Complicated Grief (Prigerson et al., 1995); the Grief Experience Inventory (Stroebe et al., 2004) and the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (Ginzburg et al., 2002) are commonly used to measure specific elements of grief and as such tend to define potential bereavement outcomes. Terms such as complicated grief may define the bereavement outcome as poor or less than ideal.

However, the depiction of an individual's grief as complicated, pathological or traumatic for example does not accurately reflect the lived experiences that the bereaved may have endured during their bereavement journey. Neither does the measurement of grief as *normal* reflect the individual experience which may or may not be painful and distressing and which differs according to nature and context.

In contrast, a qualitative research paradigm allows for the collection of narrative data to understand the perspective of individuals experiencing a certain phenomenon. Without the narrative of grief and bereavement the voices of the bereaved have not been heard, defined or understood. Listening to the stories of the grief journey is not a new concept in bereavement support (McKissock & McKissock, 2003; McKissock & McKissock, 1995) and the bereaved have provided consistent positive feedback on the impact of telling their story to non-judgemental, genuine and empathic listeners.

This study utilised a qualitative phenomenological method to study the lived experiences of spouses and parents bereaved by the death of SF partners and sons killed in combat in Afghanistan. This approach was chosen because the researcher identified specific lived experiences for which there is a significant lack of understanding and a significant gap in the literature to guide practice. Further exploration was needed to provide practitioners and military Commanders with evidence based research upon which to develop well-founded bereavement support. In summary, to understand the essence of SF bereavements requires the investigation of

common meanings of bereavement experiences and that is the central condition of phenomenology.

An alternate research approach is the mixed methods or integrated approach which combines qualitative and quantitative paradigms in varying ratios. An example would be a quantitative survey with interwoven in-depth qualitative questions which together provide a deeper understanding of the experiences being measured (Bryson, 2014). Mixed method approaches are gaining in popularity in bereavement research (Chidley, Khademi, Meany, & Doucett, 2014; Donovan, Wakefield, Russell, & Cohn, 2015; Neimeyer & Hogan, 2004) with the advantages of mixed methods cited as provision of methodological triangulation or greater strength to a specific phenomenon under study through the use of a number of methods (Patton, 2002); complementing both differing and overlapping elements of a phenomena and assisting in developing new insights (Gray 2014). The military bereavement studies previously cited used qualitative research approaches and strengthened their studies through means other than mixed methods. As discussed in Theme 1 all of these studies were successful in recruitment.

For a study to be successful, coherent and congruent the methodology, questions, purpose and design must be interconnected (Creswell, 2009). The approach needs to connect with the appropriate data collection method which in turn needs to be capable of eliciting data which provides information that makes sense of the research questions. The methodology for this study was consistent with phenomenological research utilised by a number of other studies with success in recruitment of potential participants for sudden or trauma related bereavement studies.

Overall, an intended qualitative phenomenological approach to this study appears to be consistent with the evidence that the opportunity for the bereaved to articulate their lived experience, and in doing so strengthen a sense of closeness to others has a positive impact on bereavement outcomes. Given the support for qualitative research to promote the expression of grief and to encourage the telling of a personal story there was little evidence to suggest that the difficulties in recruitment of spouses and parents for this study was related to an inappropriate research design. Nevertheless, this study was unsuccessful in recruitment and this then raises the meanings of the sub-theme of research methods. The lack of recruitment reflects the challenges inherent in the research methods of this study specifically the sampling strategy.

Research Methods

This theme reflected the unsuccessful recruitment of potential participants for this study through the use of purposeful sampling. The literature cluster indicated that the characteristics of data collection in this study needed closer examination. The sub-theme of sampling is addressed in terms of these characteristics.

Sub-theme: Sampling

Sampling emerged as a dominant sub-theme and overall was a difficult challenge to this study. The constituents which clustered to form this theme were widespread with the dominance in the absence of participants, absence of interviews and data collection. Given that the practice of sampling is one of the fundamental elements of most research and the quality of its method is critical to the credibility of the research (Patton, 2002) it is essential to consider the meanings which this theme elicits. These meanings may be found in further exploration of the basic components of sampling which include the type of sampling, the type of participants (criteria) and the method of recruitment (Creswell, 2013).

Type of sampling

Qualitative research utilises purposeful sampling in which potential participants are purposefully selected on the basis that they have considerable experience and information regarding the phenomena of interest. Within purposive sampling there are a number of sampling strategies which can be utilised depending on the purpose of the study.

Some examples include theoretical sampling as in grounded theory where participants contribute information to the generation of theories; criterion based as in phenomenology in which participants have experienced the same phenomena; maximum variation sampling as in case studies where diverse variations provide multiple perspective of a specific trait and the snowball strategy whereby participants introduce other potential participants to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This study used a narrow criterion based sampling strategy and it was anticipated that a snowball effect which is beneficial in quite specific phenomena that are not well researched would assist in identifying at least one more participant.

A review of the considerable qualitative research design literature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2009, 2013; Patton, 2002) suggests that for the purpose of this study the type of sampling was appropriate to the research questions.

Type of potential participants

The initial criteria for this study was that potential participants must have been the spouse (and thus over 18 years of age) of an Australian SF member killed in combat in Afghanistan during Operation Slipper and must have been in a relationship with the member at the time of his death. Gender and age were not considered a criteria as all SF combat troops are currently male and for the deceased, their ages ranged between 23 and 40 years at the time of death (Norton, 2013b) . With the extension of the study the criteria expanded to include parents of the deceased ADF member.

The final criterion was that the deceased ADF member must have died in battle as opposed to being killed in an accident in the area of operations or during training for combat roles in Afghanistan. There were very little difference in the causes of death of the soldiers. All were sudden, violent and gruesome. The specificity of this study meant that this criteria could not be expanded to include participants outside of this narrow selection.

Method of recruitment

The recruitment for the sample was through a SF support agency, The Trust, which has the role of providing support to families including children of members of a specific SF unit who have been killed or injured. For security and protected identity reasons this Unit, their location and family demographics cannot be identified. The requirement for a recruitment intermediary was in line with the requirements of the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee which did not support contacts from the primary researcher. Based on the researchers knowledge of SF deaths in Afghanistan, and in discussions with the COO of The Trust it was anticipated that potential participants would hold discussions between themselves on the research. It was thought that from this at least three spouses and six parents could be available.

In terms of Creswell's (2013) criteria for deciding on a specific strategy it appears that the qualitative phenomenological approach using criteria based sampling was appropriate. The chosen phenomena was specific to the lived bereavement experiences of a small sample of spouses and parents of SF combat deaths in Afghanistan and

snowballing technique was appropriate for small numbers of potential participants (Handcock & Gile, 2011).

Nevertheless, this theme has drawn attention to two possibilities in understanding the unsuccessful recruitment for this study. First, the approach of snowball sampling for this study could possibly have been more clearly structured and articulated, particularly considering the technique is used mainly in research of hard to reach/find populations involving sensitive topics. Second, Handcock and Gile (2011) explain that small sampling should first be in conjunction with initial personal contact from the researcher and thereafter snowballing can be anticipated.

In a successful phenomenological study involving snowballing (Khan, 2014) the researcher used personal and social contacts to hold general discussions with potential participants. Subsequently, more specific explorations in the context of the research ethical and design requirements resulted in potential participants opting in to the study.

Nevertheless, whilst for this study there were no participants recruited from the population of spouses there were two participants recruited from the parent population. After providing informed consent, but prior to interviews, the two participants withdrew from the research for personal and private reasons. In line with the information provided to potential participants and to respect privacy and confidentiality the reasons for withdrawal cannot be discussed. However this does lead to general considerations regarding attrition from research (Stroebe, Hansson, et al., 2006).

Attrition or the loss of study participants is considered a significant problem in quantitative research. It can create bias and lack of validity in the findings particularly in empirical studies which rely on statistically valid sample sizes. For qualitative research there is less of such effect given that a small sample size is not necessarily a hindrance to the process and the outcomes. All the same, in terms of general bereavement research, the decision of participants to withdraw from, or cease to continue to participate in research, has been a significant concern for considerable time.

Death and illness aside researchers report on a range of reasons that participants provide for withdrawal from research including life style issues, financial issues, inflexibility of research methods and lack of motivation to continue (van Wijk, 2014).

In summary the thematic analysis which elicited research methods and research design as themes of importance has provided considerations for future research in the

SF context including refinement of the snowball technique and more personal contact with potential participants. A website or online study would also allow participants to self-select and complete the study in privacy.

Additionally, the theme of research design and methods and the sub-theme of sampling identified a number of important elements within the story of this study. The continual learning which is integral to phenomenology albeit in unconventional or non-traditional ways provided the researcher with the opportunity to confront the The researcher was confronted with the complexities of research involving human participants especially in the context of the ethics review process and the ethical divide between researchers and ethics review committees/boards.

Theme 4: Ethics Review Process

This theme displayed a dominance within the study and the fundamental feature was the clusters which reflected the emergence of the ethics review process as a significant challenge in this study. The ethical review committee's knowledge of bereavement research when considering approval for this study was a significant cluster of information as was the required recruitment process cluster.

If Theme 4 is to provide meaning to the question of what has happened in this study and how is it happening, then credence must be given to the premise of a gap in the knowledge of bereavement research between the researcher and the reviewers. This is principally in respect to vulnerability and the impact of research on the bereaved. At least this is what the clusters and constituents of this theme suggest.

The importance of Human Research Ethics Committees cannot be disputed. A perusal of a number of infamous research experiments such as the New Haven social experiments conducted by Milgram and the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation child medical experiments (Patton, 2002) both of which involved abuse and neglect of participants is sufficient to reinforce the necessity for ethical approval. It is acknowledged that the need for ethical approval for this study with SF bereaved spouses and parents is absolute.

Approval was given by the HREC at ECU for a phenomenological study on the lived experiences and perceptions of social support of spouses and parents bereaved as a result of a SF combat death in Afghanistan. The data collection method of semi-structured face to face interviews was approved, however, the sampling strategy was required to utilise an intermediary to recruit the potential participants. This occurred

through formal e-mail communication from the COO of The Trust. This form of exclusion of the researcher from the primary recruitment process is a reflection of Ethics Committees' concerns that principal researcher involvement has the potential for coercion and influencing potential participants in the consent process (Chiang, Keatinge, & Williams, 2001). However, the exclusion of the researcher from initial contact with potential participants in this study had an impact on the ability to personally connect with the spouses and parents.

The constituents extracted from the analysis which included formal approach, initial contact with participants and restrictions were discordant with the principles of positive engagement with potential participants. Elements such as the development of rapport and trust have been found to improve response rates in recruitment far more than impersonal strategies (Haboush, 2010) and this was reflected in the related constituents of Theme 4.

The cluster of bereavement knowledge, including the constituents of knowledge, vulnerable populations and sensitivities were related to the literature on the views of ethical reviewers. This was particularly evident regarding the vulnerabilities of the bereaved. The view that ethical reviewers hold of the bereaved as a vulnerable population in the context of research has been vigorously challenged. Buckle et al. (2010) consider that ethical reviewers are automatically perceiving the bereaved as vulnerable, needing to be protected and deprived of the competence to provide informed consent. Rather than consider the bereaved as vulnerable and susceptible to harm if interviewed, ethical review boards should be educated on the therapeutic and positive benefits (for the bereaved) of interviewing the bereaved (Buckle, Dwyer, & Jackson, 2010).

Nevertheless, there was some overlap between Theme 4 and Themes 1 and 2 in which constituents emphasised such terms as combat death, distress, pain and sensitivities. This emphasis reinforced views in some literature on the concerns of the impact of research on the wellbeing of the bereaved (Cook, 2004; Parkes, 2001). The potential participants for this study were bereaved as a consequence of a violent combat death and as such would be considered by most measures to be a vulnerable population. Their bereavement is related to a sudden death often by gruesome means and far from home. There is no opportunity for the bereaved to be with their loved one and their grief is almost immediately portrayed in the public domain. For parents it

was the death of a child and for the spouses it was a husband or partner and possibly a father.

With respect to the cluster of ethical review processes, the view of some researchers (Buckle et al., 2010; Parkes, 2001) is that there is a lack of uniform, well informed ethical approval processes in the field of bereavement. The challenge is for ethical review bodies to determine the evidence base for bereavement studies including the actual ethical beliefs around bereavement research as held by the bereaved (Beck & Konnert, 2007; Dyregrov, 2004). The absence of participants in this study means that the views of the bereaved are not known, however the literature indicates that with respect to the views of the bereaved the vast majority of bereaved adults are positive about participating in research. Dyregrov (2004) studied bereaved parents' perceptions of research participation and found that although the majority of parents considered the interview to be painful they all reported the experience as positive. All of the parents were bereaved as a result of sudden and traumatic deaths.

Overall, from the findings of this study and other researchers in the context of traumatic death and bereavement it can be argued that research is being shaped by the views of the research ethical reviewers. Whilst ethical reviews are important and essential the growing research suggests that there needs to be a better balance between academic rigour and the limitations placed on researchers by ethical reviewer (Moore, Maple, Mitchell, & Cerel, 2013). The present view suggests a tendency for ethics reviewers to over-emphasise the potential for harm and under-estimate the resilience of bereaved individuals (Bonanno, 2008).

Nonetheless, a comprehensive thematic information analysis of this study also identified deficiencies in the methodology which have likely contributed to the study outcome. Hence, there is an onus on the principal researcher to ensure that sufficient well founded and appropriate evidence is presented to the ethical reviewers regarding the impact of proposed research on the bereaved. The findings suggest that in balancing researcher methodological requirements and the needs of potential participants further education of ethical review boards on the evidence base of bereavement is needed. This study has provided four dominant themes to assist in future research proposals submitted for ethical review.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING RECRUITMENT

Most of the literature on recruitment and retention challenges including sampling hard to reach populations, has involved discussions in the non-military context. Within these a limited number of articles have provided examples of what the authors considered innovative sampling techniques (McCormack, 2014; Sydor, 2013) such as website, internet based surveys and street based interviews which may assist to overcome recruitment challenges.

In the limited number of studies on bereavement outcomes related to combat deaths the significant and successful sampling strategies are found in the Israeli studies (Leichtentritt et al., 2013; Leichtentritt & Pedatsur-Sukenik, 2012; Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 1999). These studies depicted a number of core concepts in their success which were not replicated in this study. The use of personal contacts with community agency programs or veterans support services assisted in developing relationships and the inclusion of the relevant government agency responsible for bereavement support provided authenticity to the research.

Nonetheless, there are two differences between these studies and the current study with Australian SF bereaved spouses and parents. First, the population from which participants were recruited was the next of kin of deceased soldiers from the entire IDF and may not have involved any SF deaths. Second, the number of combat deaths in Israel far exceeds the number of deaths from the ADF and thus the Israeli studies had a larger bereaved population from which to recruit.

Despite the documented difficulties in research design a number of articles (Beck & Konnert, 2007; Buckle et al., 2010; Ells, 2011; Wilkerson, Iantaffi, Grey, Bockting, & Rosser, 2014) outline considerations for the enhancement of qualitative sampling particularly in studying hard to reach and vulnerable populations. These include the use of creative sampling techniques; the building of productive relationships and suggestions for working with vulnerable populations all of which will now be discussed.

Creative Sampling Techniques

The difficulty in research recruitment and retention of potential participants is one factor in an increased interest in the use of innovative sampling. Innovative sampling techniques have been identified as a creative way to overcome the sampling difficulties of researching sensitive topics in hard to reach populations (McCormack, 2014). Sydor

(2013) suggests that the use of innovative sampling techniques such as internet forums, chatrooms and specific websites are useful research sampling methods.

For geographically diverse populations, internet based qualitative research sampling has been found to be effective when utilising blogs, message boards and websites catering for specific communities (Wilkerson et al., 2014). The authors caution however on the need to be ethically responsible if introducing potential participants to each other on such sites.

Although some of these strategies have assisted sampling in some populations it would not be suitable for populations who may not access computers, are not computer literate or who have restricted access to social media for security and protected identity reasons (such as SF and their families).

In terms of sensitive socio-cultural groups such as the SF and their families (Macklin, 2014; McPhedran, 2007), a number of authors although referring to quantitative research suggest the use of community forums to interest potential participants. The forums are used to engage the community interest in the topic and to form partnerships through dialogue (Melton, Levine, Koocher, Rosenthal, & Thompson, 1988). To relate this to the SF community would mean either engaging in joint research after engagement with and convincement of the SF in regards to the worth of the research or obtaining Department of Defence support for the research. This is consistent with a proposal put forth by researchers (Descchaux-Beaume, 2012) investigating the French and German military fields (personnel) through qualitative analysis. An approach of insertion into the military field to work beside the military and a combination of interviews and observations was recommended.

Building productive relationships

The importance of building rapport with participants in qualitative bereavement research has been stressed by a number of researchers as a critical element in all research design (Abrams, 2010; Breen, 2006; Buckle et al., 2010). Abrams (2010) emphasises the importance of building productive working relationships and connections with gatekeepers or those agencies which may have access with hard to reach populations.

The underlying elements of engagement with potential participants, such as rapport and trust have been found to improve response rates in recruitment far more than impersonal strategies (Haboush, 2010). It may also lead to a snowball effect

whereby potential participants who are responsive to the study pass on details or encourage others within the population to also respond.

The building of productive relationships is not restricted to agencies and gatekeepers. The bridging of the gap in bereavement research knowledge between ethics reviewer committees/boards and researchers can be addressed through relationship building strategies (Hemmings, 2006). Included here is the provision of education and training of both reviewers and researchers (Lincoln & Tierney, 2004) and encouragement of more two way communication between both parties (Hemmings, 2006). This is particularly important for vulnerable populations in which there is a heightened risk for harm.

Strategies with vulnerable populations

The difficulties in researching hard to reach populations like the SF and their families, appear to be magnified if the research involves sensitive topics or specific sensitive individual traits common to the group which then make the group vulnerable to the effects of research. It is beyond the scope of this research to debate the various definitions of vulnerability and their impact on research, however, a population is generally considered vulnerable if members of that population are susceptible to harm by the research, for example traumatised individuals may not be able to give fully informed consent. A population which has been exposed to a violent, traumatic sudden death could be considered a vulnerable population particularly given the evidence of increased risk for poor outcomes such as PTSD (Rando, 1993).

A number of suggestions have been forthcoming in terms of encouraging participation in a vulnerable population (Caserta, Utz, Lund, & De Vries, 2010). The presentation of invitation letters and information sheets for potential participants are considered important and should emphasise the value of a participants contributions. The use of gatekeeper agencies to ascertain conduits to vulnerable populations can be useful in developing trust and credibility with the population (Horowitz, Ladden, & Moriarty, 2002). Additionally, Caserta et al. (2010) report that recruitment of bereaved individuals is more likely to succeed if participants form the view that the research will be beneficial to themselves; will contribute to research; will help others and is reflected in positive contact with the research staff. Finally, the recent Jennings (2013) study explicated the positive aspects of using websites and online support groups to recruit potential participants.

Each of these strategies to enhance recruitment arose out of the recruitment challenges in this study particularly the ability to recruit from hard to reach populations. The identification of such strategies indicates that the research assumptions regarding the SF and families as an available population also been challenged. The trustworthiness of a study is dependent in part on the researcher being inclusive of all information including that which challenges assumptions. This chapter therefore includes a return to the research assumptions depicted in Chapter 1 and to which Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) assert the researcher must return.

RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

Research assumptions are those inter-related thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and perceptions about a prospective area of inquiry which the researcher brings to the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Assumptions inform readers of what a researcher holds to be true in the context of the research focus.

The first assumption I held was that the spouses of SF members killed in combat would want to articulate their lived bereavement experiences. This assumption was predicated on the belief that most research into participant perceptions of bereavement research have expressed positive responses (Dyregrov, 2004). An absence of responses from potential participants could be explained by a lack of motivation and desire, an inability to participate, a lack of trust and fear of further distress or the cultural aspects of belonging to a tight, secure and restricted community which views non-SF with suspicion. Theme 1 indicated that one of the possible meanings for the lack of participants was the SF and their families as a hard to reach population which is further influenced by the socio-cultural context of the SF and their families. This in turn requires specific sampling strategies to overcome such research challenges.

The second assumption was that despite the cultural elements of SF and their families of which I was cognizant I assumed that having worked as an embedded social worker with SF would make it easier for potential participants to make contact. I assumed that my affiliation with SF would encourage a snowball effect should only one participant be identified. Whilst practice experience with SF has highlighted the nuances of SF families, including an appreciation of trustworthiness and credibility in support staff, there is also an appreciation on the part of SF families for informal communications between support staff and families.

It is plausible that a less traditional and more informal approach to initial contacts with potential participants should be considered for future SF combat related bereavement research. Such approaches could include initial contact with a known potential participant followed by snowball sampling. The role of culturally appropriate contacts has also been raised as a consideration such that for SF which is a culturally specific unit, the recruitment may need to involve SF members as intermediaries.

The third assumption involves the use of an intermediary as the recruiter for the research. I assumed that the positive relationship between the potential participants and the agency would have a positive effect on recruitment. Discussions with the COO of the agency confirmed that personal contact from me in the first instance would most likely have been more positively received by potential participants.

However, the ethical approval for this study was based on requests from the Ethics Committee that all initial contacts and requests must be through the intermediary agency. The possible assumption upon which the reviewer's decisions were based is the common belief that direct contact from researchers may cause harm or distress to the potential participants, at least in the context of bereavement. Ethical reviewers are particularly concerned with the bereaved being participants in qualitative bereavement research because of the perceived impact of interviews on the participants and the fact that the participants shape the progress of interviews, and outcomes therefore cannot be predicted (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001).

Significant research exists to disprove this assumption (Beck & Konnert, 2007; Cook & Bosley, 1995; Dyregrov, 2004; Hynson, Aroni, Bauld, & Sawyer, 2006) and highlights the views of Buckle et al. (2010) that despite the reality of distress in grief, ethics review boards conceptualise the bereaved as needing protection from the pain of grief. Buckle et al. (2010) argue that in interviews with grieving participants the researcher is not causing pain but rather, is observing pain that already exists. Further, the release of emotional pain and the telling of the story of their grief in research interviews has been reported by the bereaved as beneficial and therapeutic (Buckle et al., 2010; Cook & Bosley, 1995; Dyregrov, 2004). Although the witnessing of distress can produce discomfort for the researcher, McKissock (1995) points out that the bereaved respond positively to those who are not scared by the display of strong emotions.

The final assumption was that the lived experience as narrated by the participants would accurately reflect the lived experience of the bereaved spouses and parents. This

is a view inherent in phenomenology and is most commonly identified in qualitative research. However, this assumption was not tested due to the unsuccessful recruitment strategy.

THE WAY FORWARD

This chapter presented a discussion on the thematic information analysis of this study. In doing so, the researcher had to return to the phenomenological framework to continually relate the findings (themes) to the known literature and to the final research question of what has happened in this study and how is it happening. The four themes presented were able to provide significant insight into the unsuccessful recruitment of spouses and parents of SF members killed in combat.

The themes gave rise to the consideration of strategies for enhancing the recruitment of potential participants from hard to reach populations for future studies in SF related bereavement research. For transparency, the journey of research returned to the assumptions that underpinned this study. Further exploration identified a number of important features relating to the role of ethical reviews in the recruitment challenges of this study. The need for further education of ethics reviewers on contemporary bereavement research models and the views of the bereaved themselves on the benefits of storytelling was identified.

This phenomenological study was a story which was allowed to tell itself. It commenced just as many before it started but concluded with a comprehensive understanding of bereavement research challenges in the SF context. It provided guidance for future research and then the story into SF related bereavement should begin again.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 6 presents an overview of this study followed by a review of the limitations of this study. As depicted throughout the study this was a two phased qualitative study which became the story of a journey through the realms of a phenomenological paradigm. This study met with considerable research challenges, however, the study remained consistent with a phenomenological paradigm and allowed the story of a SF combat related bereavement study of the lived experiences of spouses and parents evolve into a thematic information analysis. The story was allowed speak for itself.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences including perceptions of social support of spouses and parents bereaved by the death of SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan. With the ongoing commitment of SF troops to the war in Afghanistan it was considered a significant study to address the gap in the literature to guide evidence based support in the context of SF combat deaths .

This study intended to implement face to face, semi-structured interviews followed by a thematic data analysis of the information provided by participants through purposeful sampling. The main research question which this study explored in Phase 1 was - What were the lived bereavement experiences and perceptions of social support of spouses of SF members killed in combat? With the unsuccessful recruitment the reformed research question became – What were the lived bereavement experiences and perceptions of social support of parents of SF members killed in combat?

The attrition of two parents from the Phase 2 study resulted in a return to the phenomenological paradigm for guidance on the way forward. Phenomenology seeks the essence of a phenomena and in this study the essence was found in an analysis of the information presented in Chapters 1 to 3. This information was a story in itself. The Moustakas modified van Kaam method was used to implement a 7 step process of thematic information analysis. From this analysis four prevailing themes and three sub-themes emerged which were subsequently discussed in the context of the question of - What had happened in this study and how had it happened? Further, the thematic analysis provided guidance on the way forward from this study. The research

challenges were overcome by the creativity which is inherent in a phenomenological approach and suggested direction for future researchers in SF combat related bereavement.

LIMITATIONS

This study is the first known study to use a phenomenological approach to the study of the lived experiences and perceptions of social support of spouses and parents bereaved by the death of Australian SF members killed in combat in Afghanistan. However, despite the rich information to guide future studies the unsuccessful recruitment on this study meant the lived experiences and perceptions of social support in the SF combat related bereavement could not be understood.

The decision to generate meaningful information from the narrative of the study itself means that the final analysis is subjective in its interpretation. The coding and extracted themes were influenced by the lack of triangulation for this study. With interview data the study could have been strengthened through the use of peer reviews of coding and the use of appropriate software for interview data analysis.

For some researchers the inability to generalise qualitative findings is a limitation especially with a small number of participants. In the event of successful recruitment and despite the transferability from one context to another, any outcomes of this study would be limited to bereavement from SF combat deaths. Nevertheless, it has been argued that qualitative findings are not intended to be generalise (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) but rather, it is the lived experience of the research participants which is important in understanding the phenomena.

Possible researcher bias is the final limitation. Despite the practice of bracketing in phenomenology the social work bereavement experiences and the subject matter knowledge of the researcher would have had the potential to influence interpretations of the narrative. The influence of personal perspectives cannot be completely bracketed from ongoing analysis, however the researcher must make every effort to control bias (Moustakas, 1994).

The limitations of this study however, does not detract from the rich information obtained and the deeper understanding of the phenomena which the researcher achieved throughout the journey of research.

THE RESEARCH JOURNEY REVISITED

My personal journey of qualitative research has been documented, however, as the study progressed, I realised the importance of revisiting the journey to document those aspects which may influence future research. This journey through a qualitative research study without the participant stories became a story in itself and, true to the paradigm of phenomenology this journey allowed for the stories embedded in the narrative of the study itself to be told. For myself as the researcher this was a journey of discovery. As the study progressed I became immersed in the process of qualitative inquiry and the richness of information and I thus developed a deeper appreciation for the complexities of phenomenology and the ability of storytelling to inspire critical inquiry.

At times the sheer volume of information and the confounding constituents made it difficult to remain focused on the objective of understanding the story. Nevertheless, I followed the principle of epoche (bracketing) as depicted by Moustakas (Creswell, 2013) and used a journal to document feelings and thoughts which had the potential to impact on my interpretations throughout the analysis. The following examples from my journal entries are indicative of the need for me to engage in ongoing self-examination;

1. “I have been sitting here thinking about the relationship between bureaucratic policies for bereavement support and the long term bereavement outcomes of NOK. How is it that a man gives his life in war in a violent way and a policy dictates what his death is worth?”
2. “I am wondering if the reality of bereavement research with SF and their families is an exercise in futility. Maybe it is that no one will ever know or perhaps no one wants to know or perhaps as SF say, no needs to know....”

These were thoughts and emotions which had the potential to impede the analytical process. To ensure that this did not happen I followed a number of suggestions from other research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Milligan, 2014) including journaling lists of issues and then discarding the lists; relaxation and then considering which personal experiences can be used to provide ideas.

Nonetheless, the experience of confronting the complexities of thematic information analysis had positive implications for future research that I or others may wish to undertake. This is especially so when negotiating the ethical review processes for approval to research SF populations. Whilst this research journey became a step into the unknown, it nevertheless, paves the way for similar research to occur.

Overall, despite the inherent conflict between the need for academic rigour and the requirements for ethics approval there was a sense of achievement in the identification of themes which explained the vagaries of research with hard to reach populations. By meeting the challenges in recruitment this research journey I have remained true to the phenomenological paradigm.

THE WAY FORWARD

The provision of military and combat related bereavement support by professionals such as social workers and military Commanders should be based on well-founded guidelines which reflect the experiences of the bereaved. In the military context there are limited explorations of the bereavement experiences associated with combat deaths and unless the dominant discourse in military bereavement support includes the voices of those bereaved then professional practice models remain limited in the provision of effective service delivery.

Whilst the decision of potential participants not to participate or to withdraw from the study meant that the focus of this study had to change, it nevertheless provided the researcher with additional opportunities at gaining insights into a complex research phenomena. The outcomes of this study will hopefully be valuable in guiding other researchers choosing to study the lived experiences of spouses or parents bereaved by the combat death of a SF member.

This study identified a number of ethical issues which contributed to the shaping of this research and which also may provide guidance in future research on sensitive topics with vulnerable, hard to reach populations. Research of SF members and SF families requires a thorough knowledge of their culture and their military and social environments. This researcher would therefore recommend that from undertaking this research, future researchers;

1. Consider Special Forces as a hard to reach population and adjust sampling strategies accordingly including creative methods such as web based inquiry.

2. Enlist the support of additional external agencies with recruitment knowledge related to military research.
3. Provide additional information to the Ethics Review Committees/Boards which outlines the evidence of the positive impact of research with the bereaved and the benefits of primary research methods. This would include the researcher making the initial contact with potential participants.
4. Consider a pilot study to identify potential recruitment issues.

Figure 8 indicates the overall processes of this study as well as the inherent questions which linked one stage to the next and now, this story of a

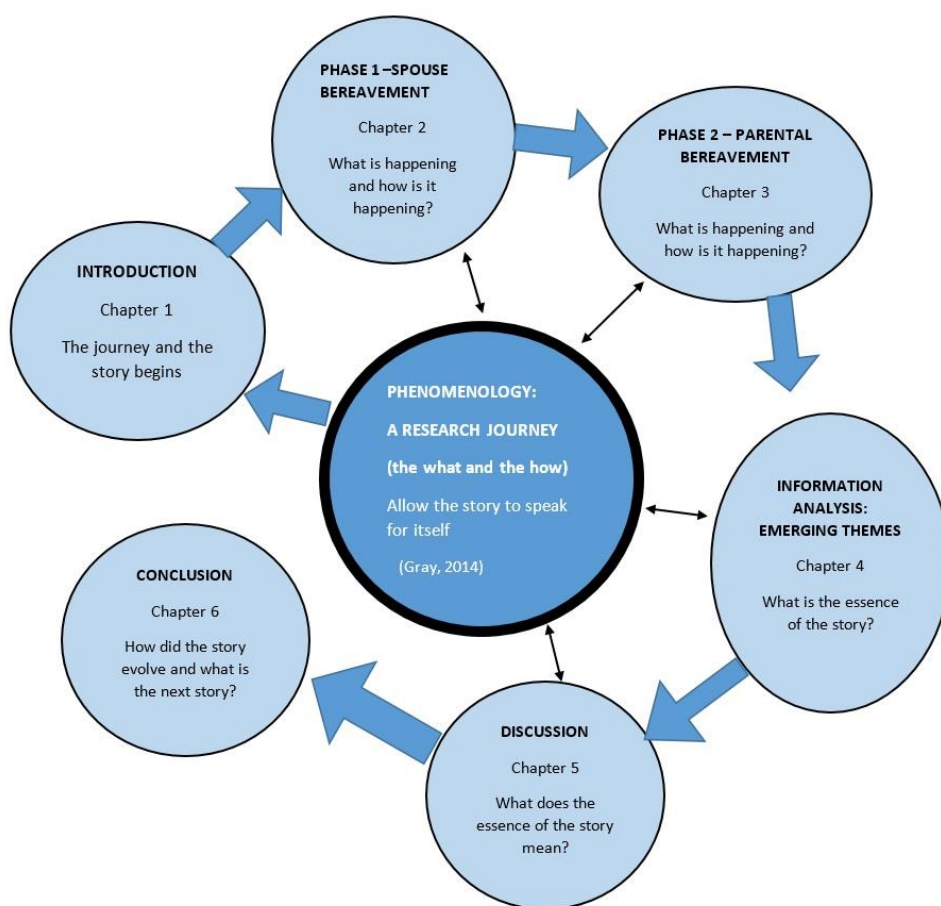


Figure 8. Conclusion to the phenomenological research journey

phenomenological research journey has concluded. Nonetheless, the knowledge from this complex study has provided the base for future studies in the SF combat related bereavement context. This then becomes the beginning of another journey.

“Sometimes the richest things can come into our lives from places we would never choose to go”. (Neimeyer, 1999)

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APPENDIX A: INFORMATION LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

[Date]

Bereavement and social support to spouses of Special Forces members killed in combat

INFORMATION LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Marion Smyth and I am undertaking a Master in Social Science by Research through the Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science at Edith Cowan University. I am conducting a study which is entitled "Bereavement and social support of parents of Special Forces members killed in combat". The aim of my research is to better understand the bereavement experienced with a combat death by inviting parents of Special Forces members who were killed in Afghanistan to participate in this study. I am hoping that a greater or more thorough appreciation of parental bereavement experiences will be a significant aspect of the research.

Benefits of the research

It is anticipated that the benefit to you and the wider community will be that your experiences and views will inform the development of guidelines for Defence Social Workers and Special Forces Command in the provision of evidence based bereavement support. In addition your experiences and views are important in understanding the level and type of social support that bereaved families may need in the future.

At present there is no known evidence on Australian Special Forces family bereavements for social workers to utilise when providing support to bereaved parents of members killed in combat. This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee Edith Cowan University Joondalup WA.

The involvement of participants

The study will be conducted in 2 stages. Stage 1 involves an interview which depending on location of participants may be face to face or by Skype. The interview will be recorded using a digital recorder. You will be asked to tell your story and experiences related to the death of your loved one. This will take no more than 1 hour and you may stop the interview at any time without explanation. You may choose to have a friend or family member with you for support.

Following the interview I will transcribe the interview and a few days later you will be invited to participate in Stage 2. For stage 2 you will be asked to read the transcript of your interview and omit or clarify any information. You may also choose to have any personal or private information removed from the transcript. I will provide all participants with a summary of the research. This stage should take no more than 1 hour.

The information regarding your lived experience of bereavement which you provide will be analysed to identify specific themes which are important to understanding the bereavement resulting from a combat death.

Privacy and confidentiality

Once the information has been transcribed the digital recording of your interview will be destroyed. The only persons who will have access to this information will be myself, my principal supervisor and an associate supervisor at Edith Cowan University. Your name will not be identified to any other person and a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity and privacy.

Whilst there are legal limits to confidentiality, further measures to protect your privacy and confidentiality will include the coding of data and the use of a locked safe for storage of all interview materials, USB and analysis information. The data will be stored for a minimum of five years in accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007) recommendations.

The results of the study may be disseminated through publications and conferences but you can be assured that results will not include any information that may identify you unless specific consent for this has been obtained from you. Your privacy will be respected.

Further use of information

It is possible that the information from this research could be used for future research, however, this will not happen without your approval, the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University and your informed consent.

Additional support for participants

It is possible that the recalling of the death of your loved one and your bereavement experiences may upset you or cause you distress. If this happens you will be provided with support. You are also entitled to access the independent counselling and support service through the Veterans and Veterans Counselling Service.

Questions

If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, please do not hesitate to contact me, Marion Smyth or my principal supervisor Dr Vicki Banham. Our contact details are as follows;

Marion Smyth

Student, Master of Social Science by Research
 Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering
 Edith Cowan University
 Joondalup Campus

Dr Vicki Banham

Senior Lecturer
 Discipline Leader Social Science
 School of Psychology and Social Science
 Edith Cowan University
 270 Joondalup Drive
 JOONDALUP WA 6027

If you elect to be participate in this research your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time without explanation or justification. You can choose to withdraw any information or material that has already been collected.

The name and contact details of the Research Ethics Officer, who can act as an independent person and can be contacted regarding any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the research project are:

Kim Gifkins

Research Ethics Officer
 Office of Research and Innovation
 Edith Cowan University
 270 Joondalup Drive
 JOONDALUP WA 6027
 Phone: (08) 6304 2170

To register interest

If you are interested in participating in the study please contact me through my e-mail
and I will arrange to discuss this with you and
for the consent form to be signed.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Yours sincerely,

Marion Smyth
Master Social Science Research Student
Faculty of Health Engineering and Science
Edith Cowan University

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

[Date]

Bereavement and social support to parents of Special Forces members killed in combat

INFORMATION LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Marion Smyth and I am undertaking a Master in Social Science by Research through the Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science at Edith Cowan University. I am conducting a study which is entitled "Bereavement and social support of parents of Special Forces members killed in combat". The aim of my research is to better understand the bereavement experienced with a combat death by inviting parents of Special Forces members who were killed in Afghanistan to participate in this study. I am hoping that a greater or more thorough appreciation of parental bereavement experiences will be a significant aspect of the research.

Benefits of the research

It is anticipated that the benefit to you and the wider community will be that your experiences and views will inform the development of guidelines for Defence Social Workers and Special Forces Command in the provision of evidence based bereavement support. In addition your experiences and views are important in understanding the level and type of social support that bereaved families may need in the future.

At present there is no known evidence on Australian Special Forces family bereavements for social workers to utilise when providing support to bereaved parents of members killed in combat. This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee Edith Cowan University Joondalup WA.

The involvement of participants

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Following the interview I will transcribe the interview and a few days later you will be invited to participate in Stage 2. For stage 2 you will be asked to read the transcript of your interview and omit or clarify any information. You may also choose to have any personal or private information removed from the transcript. I will provide all participants with a summary of the research. This stage should take no more than 1 hour.

The information regarding your lived experience of bereavement which you provide will be analysed to identify specific themes which are important to understanding the bereavement resulting from a combat death.

Privacy and confidentiality

Once the information has been transcribed the digital recording of your interview will be destroyed. The only persons who will have access to this information will be myself, my principal supervisor and an associate supervisor at Edith Cowan University. Your name will not be identified to any other person and a pseudonym will be used to protect your identity and privacy.

Whilst there are legal limits to confidentiality, further measures to protect your privacy and confidentiality will include the coding of data and the use of a locked safe for storage of all interview materials, USB and analysis information. The data will be stored for a minimum of five years in accordance with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007) recommendations.

The results of the study may be disseminated through publications and conferences but you can be assured that results will not include any information that may identify you unless specific consent for this has been obtained from you. Your privacy will be respected.

Further use of information

It is possible that the information from this research could be used for future research, however, this will not happen without your approval, the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University and your informed consent.

Additional support for participants

It is possible that the recalling of the death of your loved one and your bereavement experiences may upset you or cause you distress. If this happens you will be provided with

support. You are also entitled to access the independent counselling and support service through the Veterans and Veterans Counselling Service.

Questions

If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, please do not hesitate to contact me, Marion Smyth or my principal supervisor Dr Vicki Banham. Our contact details are as follows;

Marion Smyth

Student, Master of Social Science by Research
Faculty of Health, Science and Engineering
Edith Cowan University
Joondalup Campus

Phone:

E-mail:

Dr Vicki Banham

Senior Lecturer
Discipline Leader Social Science
School of Psychology and Social Science
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027

If you elect to be participate in this research your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time without explanation or justification. You can choose to withdraw any information or material that has already been collected.

The name and contact details of the Research Ethics Officer, who can act as an independent person and can be contacted regarding any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the research project are:

Kim Gifkins

Research Ethics Officer
Office of Research and Innovation
Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP WA 6027
Phone: (08) 6304 2170

To register interest

If you are interested in participating in the study please contact me through my e-mail
and I will arrange to discuss this with you and
for the consent form to be signed.

Thank you for your time and consideration ,
Yours sincerely,

Marion Smyth
Master Social Science Research Student
Faculty of Health Engineering and Science
Edith Cowan University

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

[Date]

Bereavement and Social Support to Parents of Special Forces Members Killed in Combat: the lived experiences

Please read the information letter before signing this consent form.

CONSENT FORM

I, -----(insert your name) confirm that
I have been provided with the information letter which explains the research and that;

- I have read and understand the information
- I was given the opportunity to ask questions
- I received satisfactory answers to my questions
- I have not been pressured to participate in the study
- I agree to be interviewed
- I agree to have a follow up discussion after the interview is transcribed
- I am aware I can contact the research team if I have any additional questions
- I may withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or penalty
- I understand the interview and any follow up discussion maybe digitally recorded
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential
- I have been advised all data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet
- I understand the information I provide will only be used for this research
- I have been advised of a counselling service I may access if required

I understand that I agree that data gathered for the research may be published provided I am not identifiable.

I understand that I have freely agreed to participate in this study.

I agree / I do not agree (circle the correct response) for the data from this research project to be used in further approved research projects provided my name and any other identifying information is removed.

I have voluntarily signed this consent form.

-----/-----/-----

Participant signature and date

-----/-----/-----

Researcher signature and date

APPENDIX D: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW SCRIPT

1. Welcome and Introduction to research participant including.
2. Explanation of purpose of research.
3. Clarification of any issues participant may raise.
4. Explain informed consent, privacy and confidentiality and security/safety of information including recordings, notes, computer and software. Participant will be advised that the interview can stop at anytime
5. Identification of appropriate pseudonym for participant including pseudonyms for any other individuals named in the interview.
6. Commencement of interview with a reminder that the interview can be stopped at any time if participant needs a break or is distressed;
7. Continue with the following statement;
I would now like to explore your bereavement and social support experiences
“Tell me about your bereavement experiences starting with the day on which (husband’s name) was killed”
8. Should the response not include information on social support, the following statement will be made
“Tell me about your experiences of support from others”
9. Should the interview not generate enough meaningful data the following are examples of questions to be asked;
 - a. “Can you tell me about the most comforting experience you had?”
 - b. “ Can you tell me about the worst experience you had “
 - c. “ Can you tell me about the day of ...(notification/repatriation/funeral)
10. At completion of interview, participants will be debriefed and offered referrals